

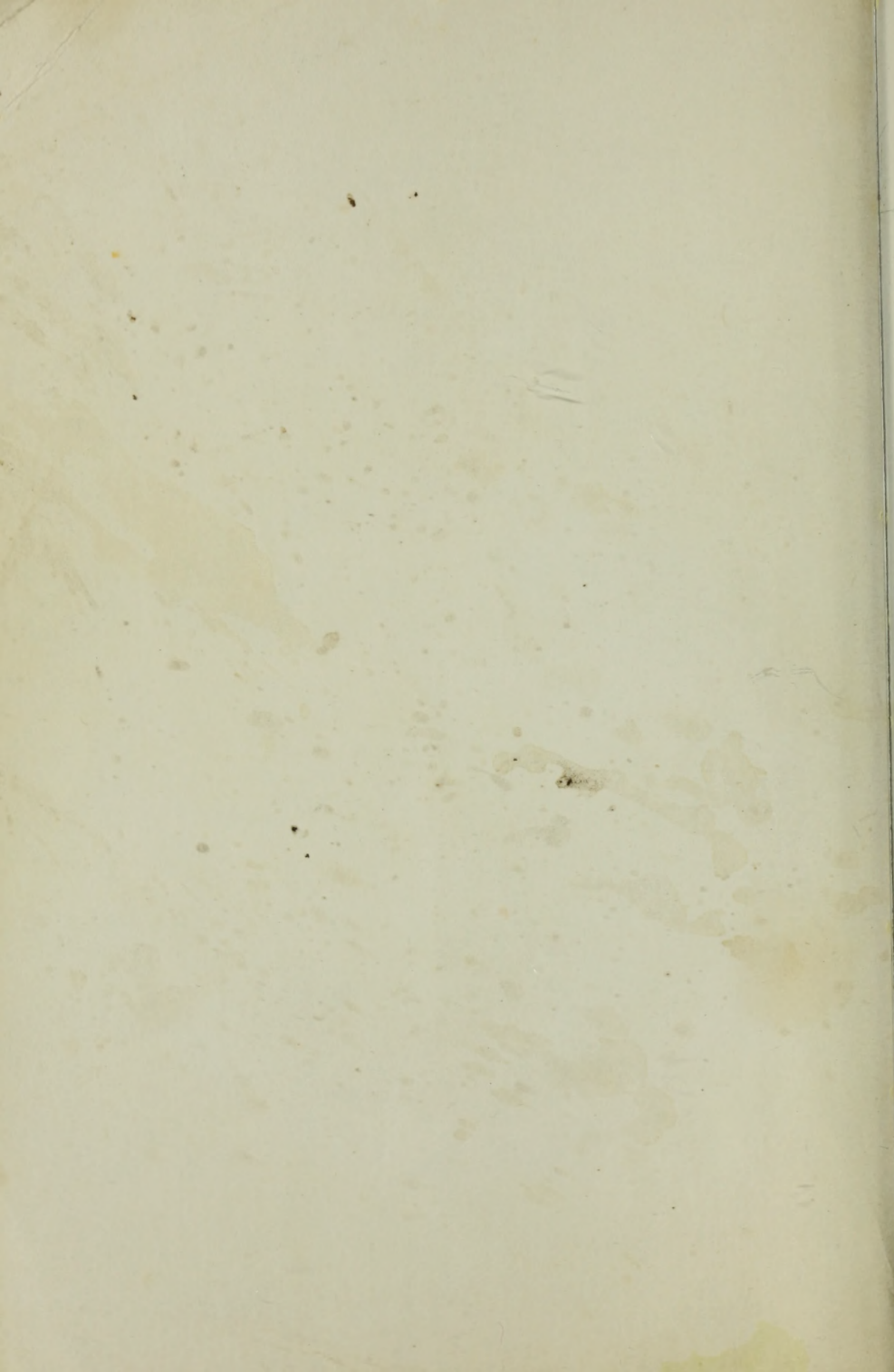


# HANDLOGGERS

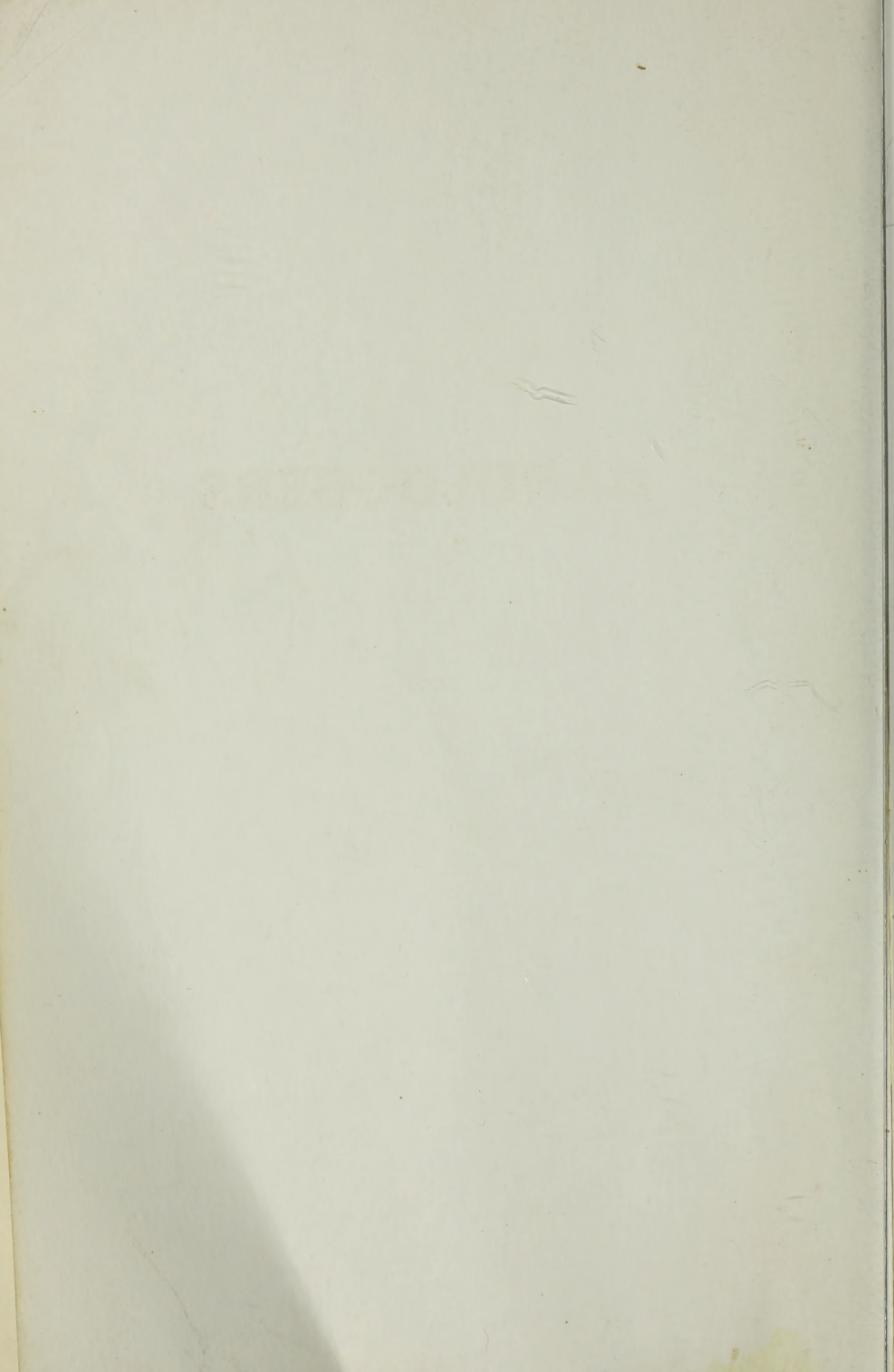


W. H. JACKSON WITH  
ETHEL DASSOW





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# **HANDLOGGERS**

THE  
HANDICAPPED

# **HANDLOGGERS**

By  
W. H. Jackson  
with Ethel Dassow

Line Drawings By Laura Dassow

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Ruth Jackson

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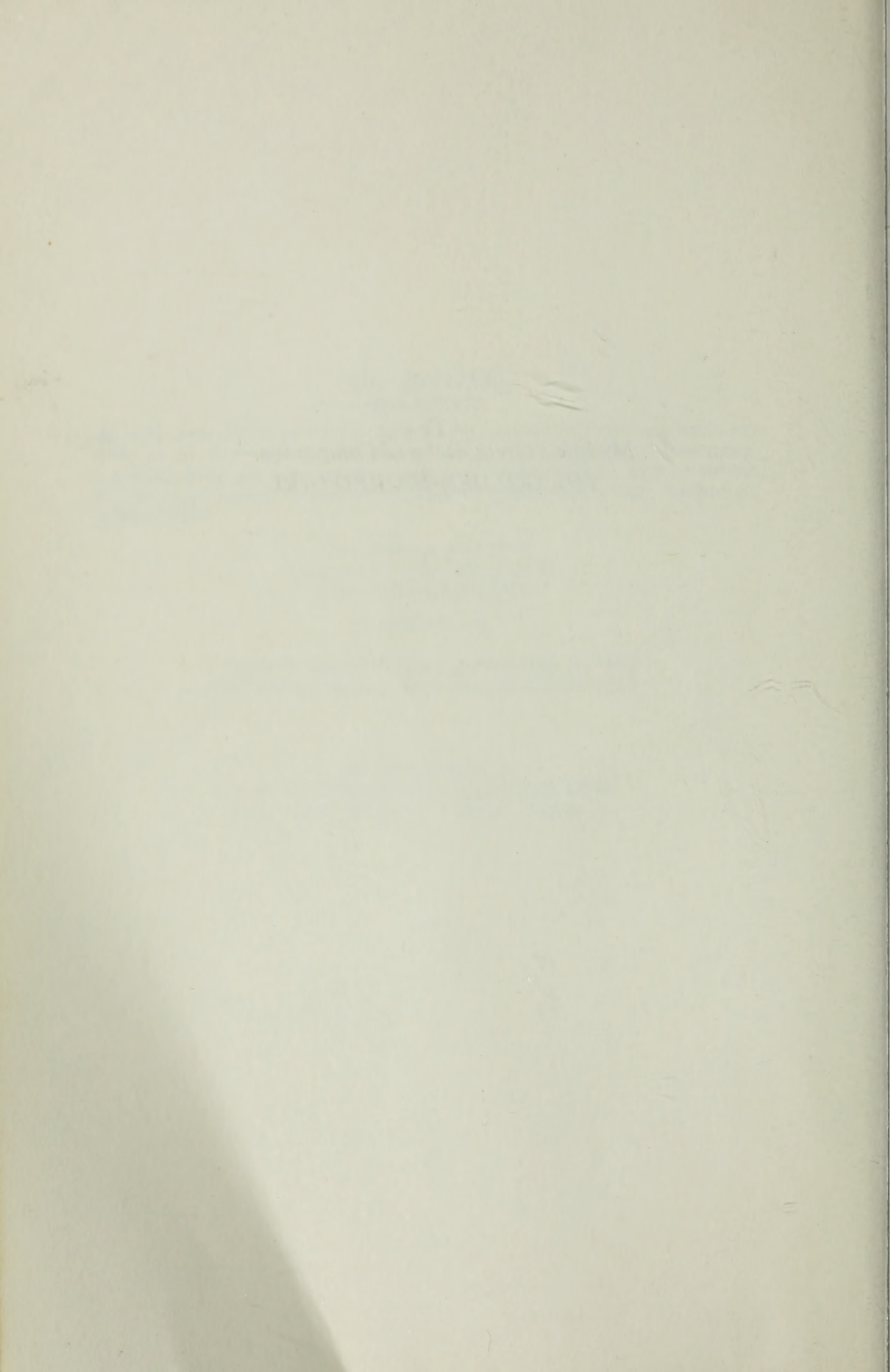
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To  
*My Life's Great, Beloved Companion—*  
**THE GOLDEN-HAIRED GIRL**



## FOREWORD

"This is Handlogger Jackson's story in his own words," Ethel Dassow declares. Nevertheless, she was the one who put it into manuscript form. As a personal friend of the Jacksons she preserved its authenticity, but with her background, she also added a professional writing touch.

Ethel was an associate editor of *Alaska Sportsman*® for 20 years.

Laura Dassow, 18, student of biology at the University of Washington, did the pen-and-ink sketches for her mother's manuscript.

Photographs are from the Jacksons' personal albums.



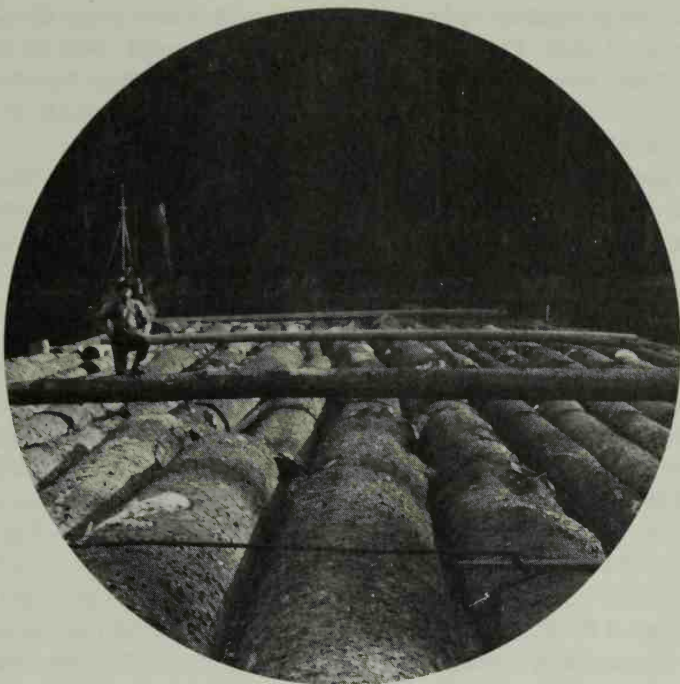


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# Chapter 1

It was hot even for California that day in September, 1907. As I climbed the hill after dinner with the fourteen-foot saw drooped over my shoulder, the charred hillside radiated heat like a furnace and the sweat ran down my face in rivulets that streaked the grime and soot.

Back at the big redwood tree I was working on, I had just time to take a long drink from my water jug before the one o'clock whistle blew. That whistle! I had been there near Crescent City since early spring, sawing the big redwoods into log lengths for the mill, and six days out of seven that whistle dictated to me. A whistle to get up, a whistle to go to work, a whistle to quit. I resented it.

I climbed up onto the head-high footboard and as I pulled the long saw rhythmically back and forth through the tree, I counted the days ahead. I would work until Thanksgiving. Then I would

take the steamboat to Frisco and the horse-drawn stage on to my home in San Mateo County. My wages were paid in gold twenties, and I would have more money than I'd ever had before in my life. I would flaunt my wealth before my school chums and girl friends.

When the quitting whistle blew I went straight to the cookhouse with the rest of the loggers, and after supper I went to my cabin, washed off the grime and stretched out on my bunk, too tired to hunt up the usual card game.

There was a step at the door and Dick Black came in. Dick was conspicuously different from the rest of the loggers. He wore a moustache he could hook behind his ears, and on Sundays, instead of going to town with the rest, he walked back into the hills with a six-shooter on his hip. He fascinated me with tales of gold mining, and from him I learned about panning and sluicing, riffles and colors.

Now Dick said, "I'm going up into Oregon on a prospecting trip. Want to come along?"

Oregon! Only decades earlier the covered wagon pioneers had followed the long Oregon Trail. I had read about them avidly in my school days, and Oregon had been prominent in the long dreams of my youth. I could go there now, for the free and independent life of a prospector. No more Bull of the Woods looking down my collar, no more the raucous screech of a steam whistle regulating my life. No going home at Thanksgiving with my wealth in gold twenties—but that could come later.

"When are we leaving?" I asked.

"How about next Sunday?"

This was Wednesday. Three days to finish the big tree I was working on. Yes, Sunday would be fine.

Packing didn't take long. I rolled my few belongings in my blankets, took my rifle from the nails over my bunk and was ready to travel. Dick gave me my first lesson on throwing the diamond hitch, and with the camping outfit on two burros we took the coast road toward Oregon.

We followed the dirt road up steep hills and down into narrow valleys. Often we went all day without seeing another soul. At the creeks, Dick taught me the art of panning the gravel for gold. After many days we reached the mouth of the Rogue River, where for a month we prospected and hunted and fished.



After many more days and many weary "Oregon miles," we walked into Bandon. There we became fascinated with the gold-bearing black sand, and Dick was convinced we had found the bonanza for which we were searching.

Established in a cabin, with sluices and riffles complete, we began shoveling the gold-bearing sands into the boxes. Our elation was short-lived. Like many before him, Dick Black soon found he had encountered a new kind of gold—thin, flaky colors that eluded all our attempts to save them. After experimenting with various methods of recovery, we finally gave up. My share of our gold was a tiny button, so insignificant I put it on a shelf and, when I moved out, forgot it.

In the spring, broke, I went to work in a logging camp in the Coos Bay country, where the firs were cut into "timber sticks" forty feet or more in length. The equipment was more modern and efficient, the wages higher than in California. In the fall, with modest but gratifying wealth, I went home.

Plagued again with itching feet, I spent the next summer in the oil fields out of Bakersfield. There, in the 116 degree heat, lizards climbed out onto the steam pipes to cool their feet. I longed for the shade of the northern forests, so the following summer I was in Oregon again, on a high springboard, swinging a long-handled ax.

There always were prospectors in the logging camps, working to get a new grubstake. These men, with their tales of rich strikes in the Skeena River country in northern British Columbia, rekindled my interest in mining. In the spring of 1912 I yielded to the lure of the northern frontier. I climbed the glacier-clad slopes of Skeena Mountain, Hudson's Bay Mountain and the Babines, searching for a hard-rock mine. In the winter I worked at the copper mine on Rocher de Boule, battling the blizzards to keep the tramline running while the mercury hovered at forty below.

I did most of my prospecting alone. With a forty-pound pack consisting of a camp outfit, bedding, and food for two weeks, I climbed the mountains, camped at timberline, and explored the bare slopes above, where the mineral-bearing lodes were exposed. Often I went for weeks without seeing a trace of man's having been there before, but old-timers had staked the veins ahead of me. I was not disappointed, though. Prospecting was just an excuse to explore the wide-open spaces, to thrill to the

beauty and wonder of nature, to pit my strength against the gales, the roaring rock slides and the torrents of glacial streams. As long as I had money to outfit, there were new hills to climb.

In the spring of 1916 there were reports of a rich mineral strike in a wilderness area near the present aluminum city of Kitimat. I outfitted in Prince Rupert, and in a sixteen-foot boat, rowing and sailing, headed down the coast.

This was a new kind of country to me, and fascinating. The canneries at the mouth of the Skeena left behind, signs of civilization soon disappeared. The maze of intricate channels between countless green-timbered islands, secluded coves and hidden bays, crystal-clear streams with tumbling waterfalls, was an outdoorsman's paradise.

I had no schedule to keep, no deadline to meet. When wind and rough water endangered my way, I went ashore. Where night overtook me, I camped. I prospected and fished and explored the isolated beaches. I dug clams and caught crabs at low tide. A fisherman showed me where to gather goose-tongue greens. My grubstake would take me a long way in a land so bountiful.

Coming down through Grenville Channel, I found myself one evening in a place where there were endless channels with the land all standing on edge. Finding a place to put up my tent looked more and more unlikely as I rowed into Baker Inlet. The rocky beach rose out of deep water, so smooth and steep there were few places where one could get ashore, and the mountainside was so steep and densely timbered that I couldn't have made camp if I were ashore.

The sun had left the valleys and was tinting the snow-covered peaks a delicate pink, all mirrored in the placid water. Truly a beautiful bit of scenery, but it had been many a long hour since I'd stopped to boil the pot, and scenery was not filling my stomach.

Resting on the oars, wondering what I'd do if darkness came before I found a camp site, I caught the spicy odor of yellow cedar smoke on the off-shore breeze. This was surprising as I had not seen a sign of human habitation for days, but someone must be living nearby. Yellow cedar is the preferred firewood of the coast forest. With quickened strokes I rowed on.

Coming around a point near the head of the inlet, I entered a bay covered with huge logs freshly cut from the forest. But I saw no logging camp, only a rowboat tied to the logs and, on shore, a

single cabin built from freshly split cedar. A man was chopping knots from a big cedar log. As I approached he stuck his ax into the log and came over to help me tie up. He was of medium build, lean and lithe, blue-eyed and graying at the temples. He gave me a friendly greeting as if glad to have company, introduced himself as Walter Clark, and said he and his partner were handlogging.

Timber I knew. I had sweated in the California sun with the old Dawson jacks, rolling logs off the steep hills so the bull teams could snake them down the skid-road to the sawmills. In the Humboldt redwoods and the Oregon fir, I had worked on high springboards to topple the giant trees. I had bucked them up and had watched the steam donkeys roar as they dragged the logs out of the woods.

I looked at this floating timber—huge cedar and spruce, six feet in diameter, a hundred feet long, and neither barked nor sniped. Any one of those logs would make a bull donkey snort, yet this mild-mannered fellow said he was "handlogging."

"What in hell is handlogging?" I asked.

Clark grinned. "Come up in the woods with us tomorrow and we'll show you," he said. He led the way up to the cabin as a short, barrel-chested fellow called from the doorway, "Come and get it!"

That evening I sat enthralled as they told me of tipping big cedars off the bluffs and into the swirling tides of the Yaculta, of sending tall firs hurtling a thousand feet down the rugged slopes of Knight's Inlet, of the big spruce, which scaled 22,000 board feet, they'd stumped in at Ocean Falls.

The next day I followed them into the woods. I saw Clark expertly pick a "lay" for a spruce and with meticulous care chop the guiding undercut. After the tree was fallen and limbed clean, I watched his husky partner place a logging jack beneath it and, with a few strokes, send the tree-length log roaring down the mountainside to plunge into the deep water of the bay and dive completely out of sight. A few minutes later there was the "blow" as the log bounced back to the surface, and then on the current of the incoming tide it floated quietly toward their camp.

That was handlogging. Two men with only hand-operated tools, accomplishing the work of an entire crew using a lot of mechanical power.

During the next several days I learned the fundamentals of handlogging and acquired logging terms I'd never heard before—stumpers and floppers, jack holds and standing jacks, lifters and sinkers, bobbars and jill pokes, sales and limits, booms and sections and peaks, swiftners and riders. I learned that a handlogger needs the agility of a mountain goat, that the search for a stumper is as fascinating as the search for gold, that a ten-ton log balanced precariously on the face of a cliff can be as dangerous as a cornered grizzly, and that the financial reward was far more reliable than that of the prospector. When I continued my journey I found my eyes wandering more and more from the outcroppings to the thick stands of virgin forest.

Swanson Bay was swarming with handloggers, seventy-six outfits of them, supplying logs for the big pulp mill there. Mention of my host in Baker Inlet brought the same assertion from all: "Walter Clark? Why, he's the best damn handlogger on the Pacific Coast."

My first instruction, then, had been from an expert. Recalling the hundreds of miles of forest-clad shores I had seen, and the exhilaration of being up on the high springboard with a long-handled falling ax in my hands, I was inevitably converted from prospector to handlogger. Here was an occupation that took me out into the big, clean outdoors I loved, with all the freedom and independence of a prospector and far less of the uncertainty. Though I did not expect to earn any such reputation as Walter Clark's, I knew I could make good wages.

The day was to come, years later, in Ketchikan, when it was said that "Handlogger Jackson could run a tree over the top of Deer Mountain if he wanted to."

Swanson Bay was a thriving community with a pulp mill, a lumber mill and a shingle mill, and headquarters for the hundreds of loggers who supplied these mills. Out of sight and sound and smell of the mills, however, was unbroken wilderness. Except for a few salmon canneries and isolated Indian villages there were no permanent habitations, no farms, no gardens, no livestock.

The inlets and channels seemed endless, winding for hundreds of miles through the maze of islands and reaching far back into the mainland. Everywhere the dense forest began at the high tide line, its lower edge leaning out over the water as if each tree crowded its neighbors for a roothold, and extended in unbroken





On a high springboard.

ranks up the steep slopes to timberline at the 4,000-foot level: Sitka spruce up to ten and twelve feet in diameter and 200 feet tall, red cedar up to fourteen feet through their trunks, and thick stands of tall, straight western hemlock without a branch for the first hundred feet.

With deep water right up to the rocky beaches, and slopes so steep that some of the trees, when dropped, would keep sliding right into the water, then float, the terrain was ideal for the small

operator. On that kind of ground, handlogging just naturally originated, and developed into a highly skilled occupation.

All a man needed for a start was a handlogger's license, which cost twenty-five dollars. If he had a preference for a certain stand of timber, the forest ranger would assign him the claim for one year. If he was a newcomer who didn't know of a good place to work, the milling company would take him out to one of its timber claims. Nor did he need money to buy an outfit. If he even looked like a logger the company would stake him to a full outfit—logging tools, camping equipment, a boat, hammer and nails for building a cabin, even working clothes and all the groceries he wanted. All would be charged against the logs he would cut.

Several times I heard the story, which could have been true, about some Indians who asked the milling company for, and got, supplies so they could "go out." Soon they came back for more supplies. When they came the third time they were asked how many logs they had cut.

"Oh, we're not logging," they said. "We're fishing for the Butedale cannery."

I had no trouble finding a partner in Swanson Bay. There were loggers of all nationalities looking for new partners—and cussing their last ones. Ideal working partners proved irresponsible in town; they might blow all the partnership funds. Fellows who were congenial in town turned out to be irritable or indolent in camp. Trivial grievances built up to acute cases of cabin fever, until living and working together became impossible. Nature never meant for men to live together, isolated for long periods from the rest of humanity.

But the cause of most dissension was the nature of the work. The successful handloggers were not only energetic workmen, they also had the ability to plan ahead, to lay out the work schedule to best advantage according to weather, tides and seasons, to insure a top quality product and adequate working capital to finance each new project. Such men are not followers, they are leaders, yet in any partnership, whether of two men or several, all can't be bosses. If anyone refuses to compromise there's trouble, and the partnership soon splits up.

Like the others, I had a series of partners. I used to claim I had worked with partners of every nationality and race except

Japanese and Negro. The partner who taught me to play cribbage was Chinese.

I tried to choose the most experienced handloggers as partners. I worked with Australians, reputed to be the best ax men in the world; with Swedes and Finns, who had cut their teeth on ax handles; with French-Canadian white-water men, with lumberjacks from the tall timber of Puget Sound, with handloggers who had graduated from the rugged fjords of British Columbia. From each I learned new methods, new tricks for taking out more timber easier, faster and safer.

But handlogging isn't learned in a day, nor a year, nor ten years. For complex situations and problems it is more intriguing than chess, each new situation taxing the imagination and ingenuity of the logger, challenging him to greater effort. I had problems crop up for the first time after I'd been handlogging for twenty years.

Searching for a new place to work, it was exasperating to find the best stands of timber in private claims, or "limits," being held for speculation by distant owners who were not loggers and who probably never had seen their claims. As they had been staked years ahead of any logging, they always contained the choicest timber and were a great temptation to the isolated handlogger. Too much of a temptation, in fact, as most of the easy-to-get trees seemed to have disappeared by the time the handlogger moved from the vicinity. We were threatened with having our whole raft of logs confiscated if we were caught stealing timber from the limits, but no ranger ever did check on where I was cutting my timber.

It was the same with the game laws. I suppose there were closed seasons, but I never heard anything about them. There were plenty of deer, and when we needed meat we got one. I never saw a game warden all the time I worked in British Columbia.

That country is still mostly wilderness, its rockbound shores without farms and pastures, but it is ideal for forest growth and wildlife habitat, and today there are rangers and wardens on patrol.

Trapping was the handlogger's natural diversion. During midwinter the woods were deep with snow, sheltered bays were iced over, our logs sheathed with ice. Floating logs, not securely held, would break loose and float far away during the long, stormy

nights. The days were short and we, bundled in waterproof clothing, could not accomplish much in the way of logging.

But most of the handloggers were skilled woodsmen, familiar with all the wild creatures and schooled in the art of capturing them. In midwinter the pelts of the fur-bearers were prime and at top value, and many of the loggers depended upon trapping to supplement their yearly incomes.

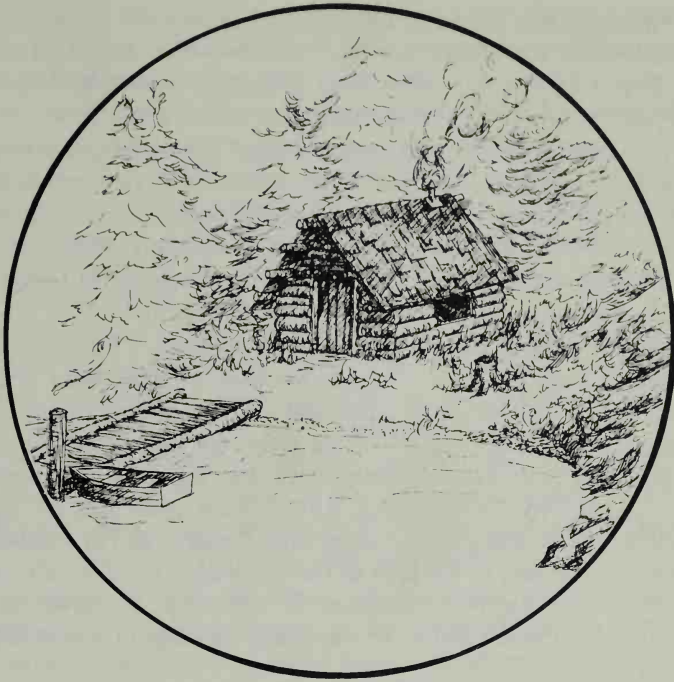
I had trapped ever since I was a small boy, beginning with gophers to earn my first tricycle and advancing to skunks that averaged a dollar apiece. When, in 1918, fur prices soared and rumor had it that marten would go to fifty dollars apiece, I got interested. I knew nothing about trapping the northern fur-bearers, but that handicap was easily overcome. I found an experienced trapper, Fred Dahlberg, who was willing to take me as a partner. He even had a power boat to take us to the trapping ground. We outfitted in Bella Bella and had a successful season in the hills of the mainland, back of Milbanke Sound.

By the early 1920's the big stumping runs had been cut and good logging shows were getting hard to find. Hunting for a new place to work, my partner and I cruised up Gardner Canal to the Kitlope River at its head. One night we anchored in Kemano Bay, a beautiful spot, then isolated but now the location of the aluminum company's powerhouse.

Gardner Canal cuts through the wild, rugged mainland mountains for seventy miles, and on its full length we saw not another human being. The best timber was on the limits, as usual, and some places had been logged, but we did find a good show on steep ground where we were sure of a season's work. Anticipating more big stumpers than at any place we had ever worked, we returned in high spirits.

But disappointment was my lot. When I applied for renewal of my handlogger's license I found a new regulation was in force—no license unless you were on the voter's list. I, as an American citizen, was excluded. My handlogging days in British Columbia were over. But the knowledge and competence I had gained were mine to take with me.

Again I went prospecting, and again I found, instead of minerals, virgin forests of tall spruce and cedar bordering the deep, quiet waters of the fjords in Southeastern Alaska.



## Chapter 2

Dick Black and I hadn't been the only ones prospecting on Oregon's Rogue River that fall of 1907. Farther up the river a tall man, so tall he had been known in Montana as Timberline, was working with pipeline and nozzle, directing a stream of water onto a bank of gold-bearing gravel, washing it into his sluice boxes. Nearby, his children played mining. Three sturdy sons and a daughter with golden curls had their own sluice box, and when the tall man had washed the bedrock clean, they searched the crevices for nuggets.

It was some years later, though, before I met the Johnstones. I outfitted in Ketchikan for a prospecting and trapping trip up the Chickamin River, and with a new twenty-foot river boat and a



strong set of oars, I put out for the seventy-mile row to the mouth of the river. In the early morning of my third day out, as I passed Ella Bay, I saw a log cabin with blue smoke curling from its chimney, and a white power boat anchored out in front.

A little later, looking back, I saw the boat come out of the bay. It soon caught up and a tall man offered me a tow. With my boat in tow, we sat out on deck visiting. I spoke about coming up from Canada, where I had handlogged and prospected. The man said he had prospected and worked a placer mine with his father on the Rogue River, but he was now handlogging.

After the season's trapping on the Chickamin, I came back to Ketchikan with my furs. Though my stay in town was brief, I heard about Charlie Johnstone and his contented family who lived out in the wild places—of the small but competent mother, the tall sons who excelled as hunters and trappers and loggers, the beautiful young daughter, Kate. There also was an older daughter, Ruth, the golden-haired one. Capable as her mother at home, she climbed to the tops of the mountains to hunt, and gave her brothers tough competition in shooting or canoeing or swimming in the icy waters of the inlets. I thought I would like to meet that girl.

On one of my infrequent trips to town I did meet her father. Charlie Johnstone's mustache and receding hair were gray and his rugged, bronzed face was seamed by sun and wind and rain. He had piercing brown eyes beneath shaggy brows, and a large hooked nose. He reminded me of an eagle ready to pounce, and I decided a wise man would try not to cross him. But he was friendly and he loved to talk. He invited me to have coffee with him, and I felt small sitting beside him.

From Charlie Johnstone I learned that he and Ed Howard, the fur buyer, had once been partners, and that the older daughter had worked in the confines of Ed's shop just long enough to earn money to buy her own fishing boat. Now she and her sister-in-law were somewhere out on the fishing grounds, trolling for salmon.

Next spring when I was bear hunting I went into Rudyerd Bay, and at the edge of a grove of spruce trees beneath towering granite cliffs I found a group of neat little cabins, built of freshly split cedar shakes. Floating in front of the cabins was a raft of huge spruce logs. A tall man was working on the logs, so I swung my boat over. He was Charlie Johnstone.

He showed me a bear hide tacked up on the end of a cabin to dry, and told me his daughter Ruth had shot it. She was out hiking on the mountain, and I left before she came home.

The next summer I was logging alone in Smeaton Bay. Handloggers must move frequently to get suitable timber for their contracts. The Johnstones, I learned, had moved to a new show only ten miles away, across Behm Canal in a place afterward named Handlogger Cove in their honor. One day I went over for a visit. As I dropped the anchor the tall man came out and called, "Come in and have a cup of tea."

The "tea" was a table groaning beneath the weight of steaming platters and coffee mugs. With a brisk, "This is my family," Johnstone motioned me to a seat at their evening meal. As I ate I took note of his family. Mrs. Johnstone scarcely came to his armpit. The teen-age boy, Bruce, was tall like his father, and ten-year-old Kate, the baby of the family, was indeed beautiful, with long, dark curls, flashing brown eyes and pink-and-white skin. But the older daughter was not there.

The house, a neat one-room cabin of split shakes, was the dwelling of the parents as well as the living and dining room for the family. The girls' room was a little cabin close by, and the boy had his own cabin on the other side. The married son, Jack, and his family lived in a float house anchored out in the bay.

Daddy Johnstone was a genial host and a natural storyteller, and his tales of hunting and prospecting continued until well past my usual bedtime. Mother filled in the details, with an occasional word from the boy. The girl, Kate, sat attentive but silent. I heard more about Ruth, now off cooking for her brother, Jack, at some distant place where he was logging.

When I left in the morning they asked me to come again. As soon as I felt I could go without seeming too eager, I put on a clean shirt and went back to the Johnstone camp. This time Ruth was at home.

She did not look as I had expected from knowing her father and hearing of her accomplishments. She was no taller than her mother. She was lithe and very feminine. Her fresh, smooth skin needed no makeup, her natural curls were burnished gold, and her friendly blue eyes flashed in welcome as she stepped out of the smaller cabin. Although I had never seen her, she had seen me twice as I found out later.



The daughter who gave her brothers competition in shooting. I wanted to meet this girl.

Before we could exchange a word, Daddy Johnstone appeared in the doorway and bade me enter. It was more of a command than an invitation, and from it I took my cue. Ruth seemed shy like her sister and I heard hardly a word from her all evening, but I was to learn that her shyness was the result of strict training.

So I had met the girl with the golden curls, but how was I to get acquainted with her? This was a problem which many a young fellow before me had failed to solve. She was Daddy Johnstone's pet, and he did not intend to lose her. He depended upon her to nurse the family through illnesses, do the packing when they moved, sympathize with him and his bellyaches, laugh again at his jokes she had heard a thousand times. He watched his guests with those eagle eyes, and should any eligible male show the slightest interest in Ruth, Daddy pounced swiftly. He would pick an argument with the indiscreet guest, then order him off the place.

And Daddy Johnstone was not a man to take lightly, standing six feet four in his sock feet, weighing 210 pounds when he was hungry, and having an uncontrolled temper. Any man he ordered away was not likely to show up again soon.

For years I had been wandering alone, discontent ever driving me. But why? I loved the outdoors and all I found there, enjoyed my work, earned a good living. Partners I'd had, certainly, yet always I had felt an aloneness, an emptiness that wanted filling. But how?

When I first looked into those warm blue eyes, I knew. I knew my wandering had been in search of this girl, that she and only she could fill the emptiness for me, and never more would I be willing to walk the trail alone.

As I continued to call at the Johnstone camp, it was quite apparent that I was Daddy's guest, welcome as long as I kept my attention directed toward him. Getting to see Ruth alone seemed more and more hopeless. Daddy was always there, watching every move, balancing every word. After a few visits I knew that Ruth was also apprehensive lest I be ordered away, but she knew her father's attitudes. A furtive glance, a squeeze of the hand under the table, once a hurried whisper, "Have patience," were all the encouragement she dared give me.

So I continued to call, going over in eager anticipation, returning dejected after listening all evening to tales of the past when I wanted to talk about plans for the future. As the weeks went by it was more and more dissatisfying to come home to a cold stove after a hard day's work. My own cooking was no longer so tasty, and eating it alone made it worse.

Each time I came home from the Johnstone camp, frustrated again, I would tell myself, "That is the last time I'll ever go near his place!"

Maybe fate had been testing my patience, or perhaps had tired of the game. Anyway, my luck changed. As I crossed the channel toward the Johnstone camp for one more "absolutely the last time," a sudden storm blew in. The dark, lowering clouds looked ominous and the blustering wind whipped up foam-flecked waves. I debated about turning back, but my boat was sturdy so I kept on course.

As I neared the entrance to the cove I saw Daddy Johnstone nervously pacing the beach and scanning the angry water. He motioned me in and when I neared his beach he called, saying Ruth, Kate and his daughter-in-law had gone for a ride in their canoe. Would I go hunt for them?

That was when Daddy Johnstone made his mistake. In his concern for the safety of the girls, he didn't come aboard to ask my help. I backed away from the beach without giving him a chance to correct his oversight, and was on my way with the engine at full throttle.

I found the girls easily. Kate and the sister-in-law obligingly went down to the galley, while Ruth joined me in the pilothouse. With the canoe in tow we started back, but the engine was not at full throttle.

It was then that I learned she had been below in the cabin that day her brother gave me a tow. She also had been in the back room of the fur dealer's shop in Ketchikan, sewing pelts into garments of her own design, and had peeked out at "the big Canadian trapper," as her brothers called me.

After that visit to Handlogger Cove, I went back to my work in high spirits. True, I still came in to a cold stove after work, and that place across the table was still empty, but I had Ruth's promise that these things would soon change. I worked eagerly to get my raft of logs ready for delivery to the mill.

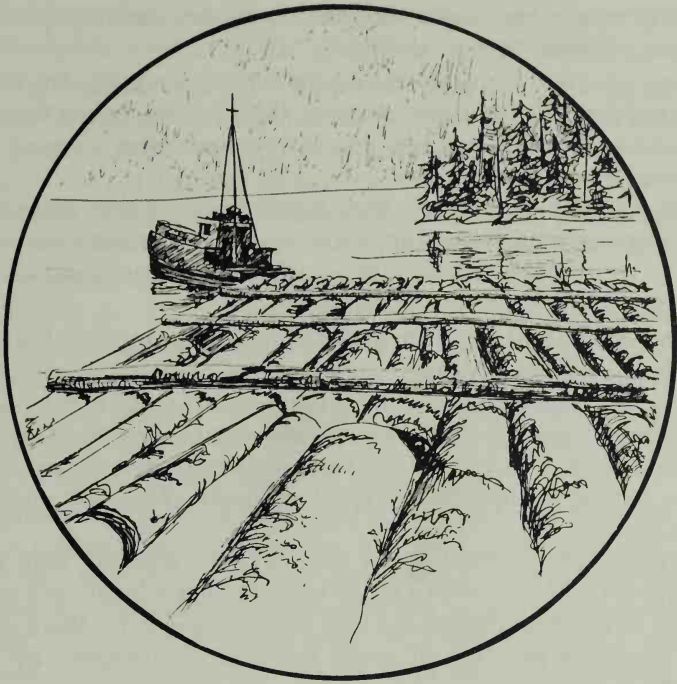
When at last my logs were ready I started to town to get a tow boat, and called at the Johnstone camp on my way. There I learned that Daddy Johnstone was ill, Mother was in town with him, and they had just sent word that they would not be back. Kate was to come in at the first opportunity, and finish her schooling. I waited while the girls packed, and took them to town with me.

After our long and carefully guarded courtship, the climax was more of an anticlimax. Determinedly Ruth and I stood side by side and announced to the old folks that she had decided to cast her lot with mine. The explosion we expected didn't come. Mother, who never did admit there was anything she didn't know, spoke first.

"You thought you were fooling us, didn't you," she said. "Well, you didn't fool us a bit. We knew all the time what was on your minds." She came over, pulled my head down, and kissed me.

Daddy Johnstone knew his older daughter better than we supposed. She could be just as determined as he, once her mind was made up, and it was his time to admit defeat. He simply told me to come back in the morning and we'd make plans for the future.





## Chapter 3

So it was with her parents' blessing that I took my bride down to my boat one beautiful spring day and we started out together. We had no conventional honeymoon because I had to get back to my logs, but that first voyage of Mr. and Mrs. Handlogger Jackson was the beginning of a honeymoon that went on for a lifetime.

Our home, the *Alton*, was a thirty-foot cabin cruiser, built by a Seattle dentist to take himself and his wife cruising in Alaska. The boat was sturdy and seaworthy, cozy and neatly furnished. She had lockers and cabinets, a table that would seat four, a sink with running water, a folding double bed and an extra bunk for guests, big mirrors on the walls and bright linoleum on her inside decks. She was so much neater than the usual logging boats, with their greasy decks chewed by caulked boots, that one fellow, after

visiting aboard her, told the neighbors, "I don't think Jackson is logging. I think he's moonshining."

Now, neat curtains appeared on the *Alton's* windows. The stove was polished, the teakettle gleamed, there were vases of flowers, and other feminine touches proclaimed there was a woman in command.

Now, when I came home from work, the boat was warm and comfortable, a bright face smiled as I entered, I found a hot meal on the table, and when something exciting had happened during the day, I had someone to tell it to.

While I was working, Ruth explored the coves and beaches and wildflower meadows or took her rifle and climbed the hills, looking for hooters. In the long summer evenings we rowed to the beach meadows to look for deer, and see how close we could get to the feeding bears. I took time from work occasionally so we could go berry picking or trout fishing together, and explore new streams and lakes.

In Alaska I found the logging situation quite different from that in British Columbia. With a much more limited market, and most of the timber being taken out with power equipment, there were still hundreds of miles of shore practically untouched by the logger.

Whereas most of the timberland in British Columbia was privately owned, almost all of Southeastern Alaska was in the Tongass National Forest, supervised by the U.S. Forest Service.

I worked always on contracts or special orders: spruce and red cedar saw-logs, red cedar shingle timber, hemlock for ties, yellow cedar for boat lumber, hemlock for piling, cedar for poles. I filled orders for spruce logs 165 feet long for fish traps, spruce logs for boom sticks on the Great Lakes, yellow cedar power poles eighty feet long, power poles for Metlakatla that could not vary a quarter of an inch from specifications because they had to be carried in by hand, and clean, straight thirty-foot red cedar poles to be carved into totem poles. Two of those poles, carved, stood on the street in Ketchikan for several years. Finally they were sold and shipped to Switzerland.

I found experienced partners scarce at all times and practically nonexistent during the summer, when almost everyone turned to the more lucrative salmon fishing. My first summer in Alaska I was left in midseason to work alone. It proved so much more

satisfactory that, except occasionally on a hurry-up contract, I continued to work alone for the rest of my handlogging career.

I accomplished as much per man-hour, with no arguments about how, when or where. I could work as long a day or as short as I pleased, and when the flies were biting in the woods and we thought the trout should be biting in the creek, Ruth and I could go fishing. If we were right about the trout, Ruth didn't have to hurry home and cook supper. When the logs were sold we didn't have to split the pot. It was all ours.

The first part of a logging job was to get a contract, then find a stand of timber with which to fill it. Satisfied customers are as important in the logging business as in any other. The logger has to know his timber and know his market, and if he can't deliver first class timber fitting the customer's specifications, he may as well trade his logging outfit for a fishing boat.

Sometimes I knew where to find the timber I needed. If not, we went timber cruising. Following the shore with the *Alton*, we watched, and when we saw a likely looking stand I rowed ashore to examine the trees for quality and the terrain for accessibility. Once Ruth and I examined more than 800 miles of shoreline before we found timber to suit us. That was to fill an order for yellow cedar for capping and sills for the plank streets of Ketchikan.

The next step was to get a permit from the Forest Service and pay the stumpage. If, for instance, I had a contract for a 100,000 feet of shingle timber, I would pay the stumpage rate and the Forest Service would issue me a permit to cut that amount of red cedar saw-timber at a specified place in the National Forest. I guess Uncle Sam didn't trust the handlogger, because we had to pay the full amount before we struck an ax into a tree.

Whereas in Canada we were confined to one mile of shoreline for one year, in Alaska the permit would cover about five miles of shoreline and we could have it transferred to a new location as often as we wished. More than once I have cut timber along thirty miles of shoreline for a single raft of logs. Our handlogging permits were for "selective cutting," or by amounts, so I cut only the trees I wanted and let the rest stand.

Starting the actual logging, my first work was to get the boomsticks—slim, straight spruce logs, the longer the better,

usually 125 feet long. With four-inch holes bored in their ends, and coupled together with heavy boom chains, these boomsticks were anchored with steel cables in some sheltered cove that was to be our headquarters as long as we were in the area. Our launch was safely moored to the boomsticks, the logs were stowed inside them, and planks laid across them gave us extra deck space. Here we could pull up the skiffs and keep extra rope, cables, a drum of gasoline. Ruth often managed to have a clothesline and flower boxes. When we were away with the boat, anyone passing by would be amazed to see flowers blooming out in the middle of the bay, or find a rope ladder hanging from a floating boomstick. Ruth found the ladder handy for climbing out after a swim.



I knew every log in the raft.

With the boomsticks in place we were ready to start the real logging, falling trees. (We didn't "fell" them, except in past tense.)

Handloggers disdained small timber. They never shouted, "TIMBER-R-R-RI!" when a small tree was about to fall, they hollered "Brush." We called the small logs "pike poles" and

“hammer handles.” When you’re paid by the thousand board feet, one good big tree could be worth a dozen small ones. If we got it afloat in one day we had something to brag about, and if it took us a week we were still making money. If our eight-foot falling saw wouldn’t reach through a tree, we would chop notches in the side until it did, and when we got to work we could stay right there and work, not waste time dragging tools through the brush.

Often the hardest part of falling timber on steep, rugged ground is getting the tools up to the tree. Packing a load of falling tools up a steep, slippery hillside, over boulders and fallen trees, through thickets of brush and devil’s club, around bluffs and precipices, is exhausting and time-consuming. It usually took half an hour, sometimes an hour or even longer, and I have left many a fine tree standing because it was just too hard to get up to it.

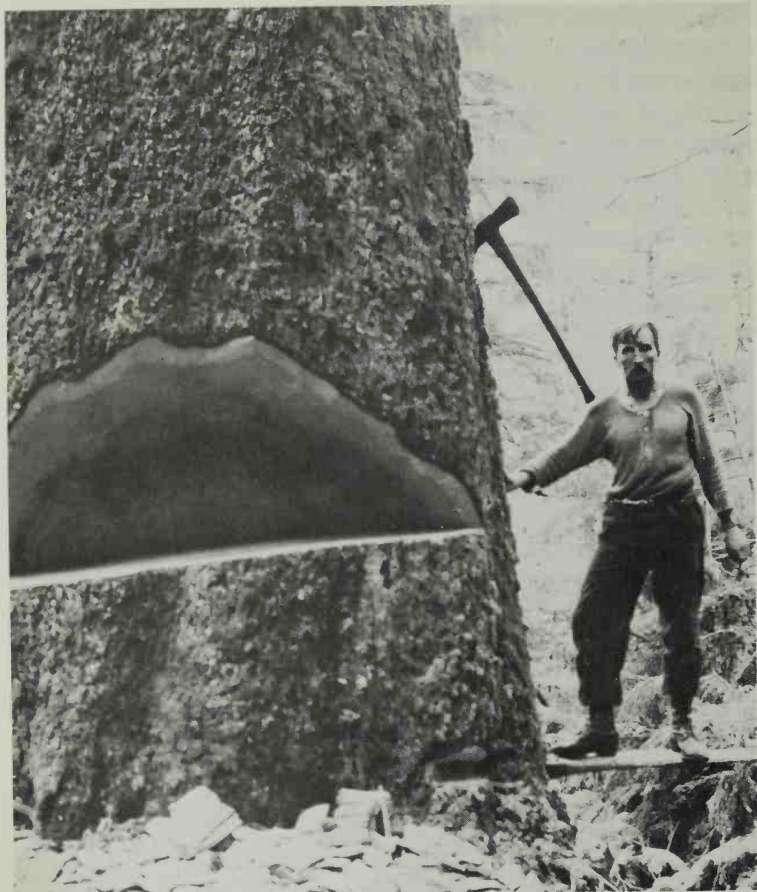
Reaching the tree with the necessary tools, we surveyed the best place to drop it. We looked for a route free from stumps, boulders and other obstructions, and as straight down to the water as possible. Often the best route would be but a few feet wide, and to miss it by even a narrow margin could mean extra days of hard labor.

We used wooden springboards eight inches wide and five feet long, tipped with iron. They had to be light enough to be carried with the rest of the outfit, yet strong enough to support the logger’s weight. The iron tips gripped the wood of the tree, so the logger could “jump” the board sideways without dislodging it. While he was chopping the undercut, the logger’s life literally rested on his springboard.

To guide the tree the way you want it to fall, you must make a deep undercut. Alaskan trees have a tendency to grow on the brow of a knoll or the brink of a perpendicular cliff, and to make the desired undercut, you have to work on the outer side of the tree. Into the boardhole, a deep, wide notch in the side of the tree, was inserted the springboard. The logger climbed onto it, hooked the toe of one boot under the board, and jumped it around the tree until he was out in front.

Sometimes we had to go up two boards high, or three, or more. We stood on the springboard, chopped another hole at waist height, inserted the second board, and climbed up on it. Standing there, we chopped the third hole, then, reaching down with the





Chopping the undercut.

ax, lifted the first board up and placed it in that hole. Three boards high, standing there swinging the long-handled falling ax, we really needed our calked boots for safe footing. I have watched chips fall twenty feet to the topmost branches of a hemlock tree eighty feet tall. Another time, while I was undercutting a tree that grew on the brink of an overhanging cliff, every chip dropped seventy feet to salt water, and sea birds, startled from their rookery, flew nervously beneath my feet.

In sawing the back cut I used an ingenious arrangement of springpole, weight and pulley that was easy to set up and made sawing as easy as if I had a partner.

Accuracy in falling is the most exacting part of the handlogger's work. If he can't drive a stake with the tree, a hundred feet from the stump, he's no handlogger.

A small tree is easily diverted. A little wind will swing it aside, another tree will crowd it over, or it will get skybound—tangle on a big branch of another tree and not come down at all. Then we had to get underneath and fall the tree it was hung up in. If that was too dangerous, we might fall another tree into the obstructing one and knock down the skybound tree.

There were other methods, too. Once I was falling a tall, slender spruce I wanted for a boomstick. They were scarce and hard to

It's the big ones we like.



get, so when this one became skybound, I gave it a most disrespectful calling down. It remained aloft.

Ruth was on the hill hunting deer. When she came back I called her over. With a couple of well-placed shots, she cut off the limb my tree was fouled on. It dropped and slid down into the bay. That, as I recall, was my easiest recovery of a skybound tree.

A big tree, with its wider stump base, is less likely to be turned aside, and with its greater weight will crash down through other trees exactly as intended. When a big tree "hits a-running" on steep ground, it will smash through everything in its path, knock down or uproot small trees and stumps, shove boulders aside, plow through rotten logs and the tops of knolls. All its own limbs and knots break off as, gaining momentum, it goes roaring down the mountainside, a veritable demon of destruction until—if it is our lucky day—it will plunge into the water and float free, a stumper.

In the meantime, as soon as he's safe from falling limbs, the logger hops up onto the newly made stump and shouts encouragement to the running tree, then whoops with joy when he hears it blow.

But if the gremlins are at large and prankish, the commotion down below may suddenly stop. There'll be no blow, no telltale waves rolling out from shore. The tree has stuck. Then the logger, if he is a real logger, will fairly scorch the bark off the hemlocks with his loud and venomous comments. Instead of a stumper he has hours, maybe days, of hard, dangerous work ahead of him.

The causes of a tree's stopping are many and varied, each presenting a new problem, each requiring a different technique. Sometimes the problem can be solved in a few minutes; sometimes it takes days of effort. Almost always it requires the utmost caution and all the skill at the logger's command, as the trouble spot is usually at or near the tip of the tree, and that is where he has to work to free it.

Picture a ten- or twenty-ton stick of timber, up to a 150 feet long and so big around you can't climb onto its upper side, clinging precariously to the wet, slippery face of a mountain so steep you have to hang onto something just to stand there. Toward the downhill end of this log, something is keeping it from moving. You have to find out what, then get down there beneath the log and get it loose. Your life depends upon your anticipating

just what the log will do when it starts to move, and the precise moment it will start.

You are lying there beneath the log, working to free it. When the last blow of the ax or the last stroke of the jack loosens the log, things start to happen, and happen incredibly fast. Before you have time to leap to your feet the tree is roaring past with the speed of an express train, smashing everything in its path. Many times, before starting to work in a dangerous place, I carefully chose my escape route, cut out a trail, painstakingly removed every twig that might trap me, perhaps even cut steps in the ground, then practiced whirling and making the jump to safety. One misstep at the critical moment, one false move, and your logging days are over.

But dangerous situations and hairbreadth escapes are commonplace in the life of a handlogger. They break the monotony, add spice to the daily grind.

I recall working in a precarious position beneath one tree I knew would be extremely fast when it was free. At the first shudder I moved so quickly I jumped right out from under my hat. After the tree ran past I returned to find my hat, what was left of it, ground into the hard dirt.

Once when I was working with Rocky Mountain Slim, we dropped a spruce, 120 feet long and six feet thick, that ran down and stuck with its nose buried under a clump of roots at the foot of a high rock wall. Only a little of the top was buried; the rest lay full length up the smooth rock wall. It didn't look so hard to get. The roots holding the tree were on the top of a small mound. If they were cut the tree should slide on through. We set to work.

We had the biggest roots cut and were busy chopping when the rest broke with a sudden bang, and the tree started down. We jumped, and took off in opposite directions. I looked back and saw that as the tree was sliding forward, the butt was rolling down the wall on Rocky's side. The tree ran half its length, pivoted on the mound, and the top came sweeping up the hill toward me, knocking down saplings that were slapping at my heels.

I had good going, so was soon in the clear. Then I stopped to look to my partner. Rocky had chosen to cross a swale filled with boulders and brush. He was tearing across there like a scared cat,

his long legs hitting only the high spots, with the big log bouncing down at terrific speed almost on top of him. One slip and he'd be mashed to a pulp.

He cleared the end of the log just as it flashed by, then stopped and watched calmly as the log turned end-for-end and slid butt first down the hill. That was the only time I ever saw a 120-foot log turn completely end-for-end up in the woods.

Working alone, I seldom used the lumberjack's warning when a tree was about to fall. There was not another person within miles except my wife, and she always knew where I was working. If the boat was anchored nearby, I would call to her so she could come on deck and watch, and she'd be pulling for me, hoping for a stumper.

Only once, so far as I know, did I ever come close to hitting anyone with a falling tree, and that was the pilot of a flying plane.

I was falling an extra-tall spruce on the brink of a 300-foot cliff that rose straight from the water of the bay. I was making the last strokes with the saw and the tree was beginning to talk—little snaps at first, then louder cracks and pops with the breaking of the last wood.

Then I heard the drone of a motor. A boat, I thought, following the shore. I quit sawing but the top of the tree kept moving. Nothing could stop it now. The sound of the motor grew louder, definitely closer, too close. It would drown out any warning I could give, and that tree could smash a boat to kindling.

With a last loud pop the tree let go. Its top swung out, then down. No whoops of joy this time. I held my breath, expecting the worst, powerless to prevent it. The 175-foot tree was nearly horizontal and sweeping downward with terrific speed when I saw a Fish and Wildlife Service plane flying directly beneath it.

Later I told the pilot how near I'd come to picking him right out of the air. He admitted he'd been cutting corners, looking for fish pirates, and assured me he would give me more room in the future.

That happened on the red bluff at the mouth of Yes Bay. Above the bluff was a stand of tall spruce on a steep slope. As I fell them they would run down the slope and disappear over the brink of the cliff. I'd find them floating below, but I could not see a mark where they had come down. One day Ruth came to watch. She reported that the tree shot out a hundred feet, like a giant spear



thrown by some demon at the top of the cliff, then turned downward, struck the water end-on, and went completely out of sight. It stayed down so long she was sure it had stuck on the bottom, then with a rush of water shot back up, butt first, sixty feet into the air, fell over, and floated free.

When I went to get my log I found it was 145 feet long with its top broken off, and stripped of every limb and most of the bark. Only in these glacier-carved inlets is the water deep enough so close to shore to submerge and strip a tree that long.

One day Ruth rowed over to watch the fall of a cedar that stood on top of a perpendicular cliff a hundred feet high. She waited in the skiff where I could see that she was safe, yet close enough for a good view. The tree was seven feet in diameter, tall and straight. When it fell the top swung out and down over the cliff to a narrow shelf at the edge of the water, while the butt of the tree, bouncing from the brink of the cliff, flew up. There it poised, upside down. Then, slowly, the butt swung straight out and down, and the tree struck full length on the water with a resounding slap that sent a geyser high into the air and echoes reverberating from the distant shores.

"I don't expect to see anything like that again!" Ruth remarked. She never did, and neither did I.

If all the trees were stumpers, handlogging would be a get-rich-quick proposition, but there were tough ones too. One of the toughest I ever took out was a big spruce I expected to stump in, and it did start running, but the top broke off and it gouged into the ground on a soft ridge.

Still it looked fairly easy to get, so I packed up two jacks and went to work. We used the Hercules jack, a lever-action steel jack with a lifting capacity of five tons—and, incidentally, with sharp corners that bit deeply into the shoulder if you had to pack it far.

The tree spanned a gully, so the only place I could work on it was at the top, and it was so heavy that with the two jacks under it I could raise it but one notch at a time. With my feet against the log and my full strength on the jack lever, I would make one notch. Then to the other jack for one hard-earned notch. Back and forth, a notch at a time, I lifted it slowly and at last got it up onto the skids. It started, ran a few feet, slipped off the skids, and buried its nose in the ground again.

I chopped off the top, jacked it up again, got it moving. Again it slipped off, buried its nose, and stopped. Over and over again, in a pouring rain, soaked to the skin, I chopped off the upper end of that tree and worked the jacks. If I gave up I'd lose all the work I had put into it.

Late in the afternoon of the sixth day I got the tree started once more. As before, it shoved the skids aside and burrowed into the soft ground. By now I was disgusted enough to throw the jacks into the bay and walk off, losing six solid days of sweat and toil, but I was so tired I just stood there, waiting for something to happen. It did. The top of the tree was now up near the brow of the bench, where there was less resistance, and its great weight pushed it on through to the lower side. Growling and grumbling, with me suddenly alive and shouting encouragement, it moved on at a pace no faster than I could walk, smashing through roots and pushing boulders aside. The top thrust itself out among the upper branches of the trees below, then overbalanced and dropped. The butt raised high into the air, gaining momentum. Then with a rush and a roar the tree raced down the mountainside. I held my breath, listening, heard it swish onto the water, heard it blow..

After all the times I had chopped the top off that tree, I still had a straight, clean log 138 feet long, with more than 8,000 board feet in it, so I was still well paid for my work.

The most disheartening incident that ever befell us, in logging, came when we were working in Smeaton Bay. We started work in the spring and by midsummer had a sizeable amount of fine spruce logs of which we were justly proud.

In mid-August we had to make a routine trip to town for supplies. An intense storm kept us away for several days. Coming around Point Alava on our way back, we saw freshly cut logs on the beach. My logs! The storm had broken them loose and scattered them along the beaches for thirty miles. We worked a month relogging my logs off the beaches, and some of them we never did find.

And there were amusing incidents, though some of them weren't so funny when they were happening. Like the time two of my neighbor loggers were working together on a tree that had hit a narrow rock ledge and stuck by its top. They'd peeled it clean and it was lying on steep, wet ground, so as soon as they got the top freed that log was going to come down fast.

With a jack apiece, working on opposite sides, they were tense in realization of danger. Each had his escape route in mind. At the first move of the tree, each dropped his jack and jumped. But each had chosen a route straight ahead, so they bumped into each other and both sat down hard beside the tree.

In this instance, failure probably saved their lives. The tree moved ten inches, then stuck again.

Once, when the whole crew from a logging camp came to town because of a mechanical breakdown, a friend of mine remarked, "When Handlogger Jackson has a breakdown, he just puts in a new ax handle and goes on working."

Often I was asked why I didn't use power.

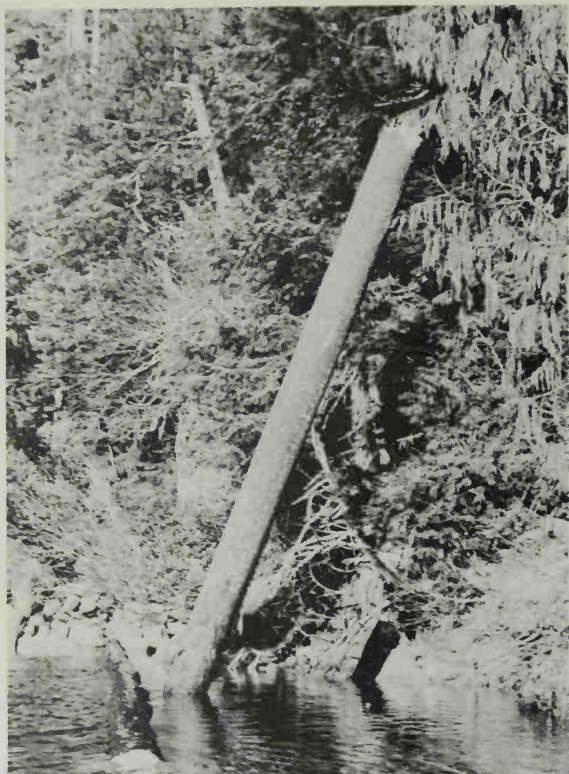
"I do use power," I would answer. "I use the two greatest powers on earth, gravity and the tides."

How to make these powers work best for him are the secrets of the handlogger's trade. On the steep mountainside, it is gravity that brings the big logs roaring down out of the woods. When they drive into the water and stick fast on the bottom, it is the tides, properly harnessed, that pull them free.

One tall spruce I fell, far back on a very steep mountainside, ran down and struck in ninety feet of water, drove twenty-two feet into the bottom, and stuck fast. For a lifter on that one I used a log 120 feet long and four feet in diameter, which I fastened on at low tide. The tides worked on it for two weeks before the big spruce came free. The handy part of such an operation was that, once I got the lifter in place, the tides worked nights and Sundays and while I went fishing—and they never submitted a bill.

The big tides in Southeastern Alaska, where the range is twenty-five feet, are a great help in lifting logs off the beach. In summer the highest tides are at night, so there isn't an hour of the day or night that I have not been out working on my logs. Because of the long hours of summer daylight, of course, less of this night work was done in darkness than it would have been farther south. Nor are there many hours, summer or winter, that I haven't been scrambling out of the water.

But if the handlogger wants to get his work done he has to lean on the pike pole and peevey, and when one slips, overboard he goes. A pike struck into a rotten knot, a step on loose bark in the dark, logs sheathed in ice, clogged calks, any of these or any of a



The tree stuck in 90 feet of water.

dozen other things may result in wet clothes, a watch to the watchmaker and some tools down in Davy Jones' locker.

Often, fishing for tools was just as interesting as trout fishing, and more profitable. Once, with a mink trap on the end of a line, I fished my ax out of thirty-five feet of water.

I always tried to keep my logs where they were afloat at all tides. Out there walking a single boomstick with a sixty-pound boom chain around your neck, or working on small, unstable logs while the waves are rolling in from the open channels, you need good balance and agility. It is a compliment to a handlogger to say he is catty—but better not say it about his wife.

Ruth's balance and agility were exceptional, too, but on occasion she also found herself scrambling out of the water. Like

the morning the sun came out bright and clear after several days of rain—the kind of morning when Alaska is the most beautiful place in the world. The rain had rinsed every wisp of haze from the air and distant mountains stood out bold against the blue sky, the trees were all wearing their greenest foliage and forest, mountains and snow peaks were repeated on the mirror surface of the bay.

After being housebound for several days, Ruth hurried with her morning work so she could get out and enjoy the beautiful weather. She found her skiff, tied to the boom, half full of water from the heavy rain. To empty it, she thought, she'd just pull it up onto the logs and turn it over. She had it part way up when it stuck. She yanked hard. The painter broke.

The logs were all big, high-floating cedars, loosely stowed, with an open space near the center of the raft. When the rope broke, Ruth stumbled backward and, unable to recover her balance on the floating logs, scuttled backward across the raft to the open spot and into the water.

It's easy enough for a good swimmer to climb up onto small logs, but not onto logs like those. Ruth, small as she was, couldn't find a thing she could reach and pull against, so there she was, fully clothed and marooned in the chill water in the center of the raft. We were the only ones in the bay and I was working a mile down the shore.

Ruth's dilemma could have been serious, if I hadn't left a pike pole lying on the logs. She spied the end of it, and, jumping like a king salmon trying to throw the hook, managed to grasp it, then drew it over to span the gap between logs and pulled herself out of the water.

When I fell one of the big floppers, trees growing at the water's edge, they had no chance to run and break off their branches. The big cedars especially looked like floating islands. We'd bring the launch alongside so I'd have the necessary tools handy and the deck to work from, Ruth would go on with her work, and when it was time for a meal or a coffee break, I had only to step down into the galley. Sometimes, with a strong tide running, we would drift for miles before I had the log limbed clean. Then we would tow it to our home cove and add it to our raft.

When we were planning to stay all summer in one place, we would clear a plot of ground on shore and plant a garden so we could have fresh lettuce, radishes and green onions, but mainly so





Big cedars looked like floating islands.

Ruth could enjoy planting things and watching them grow. As an old Indian once told her, "You like a Chinaman. Chinaman always has little garden."

The season over or the contract filled, I prepared the raft for the trip to the mill. With the logs tightly stowed inside the long boomsticks, I pulled long, slender logs across the top. These were the swiftnets. Bored and chained to the side sticks, they bound the raft securely for the long tow through the rough water of the open channels.

After the big diesel tug that came for the logs rumbled out of our cove with our raft in tow, the place always seemed lonely and deserted. I knew every log in that raft, I had sweated and toiled over each one, and we'd watched our front yard grow from a single log to a solid expanse of floating timber seventy feet wide and three hundred feet long. We were proud of our raft and we missed it.

One day Milton Daly, superintendent of the Ketchikan Spruce Mills, instructed Ernie Steers, his tow-boat captain, to go out and get Handlogger Jackson's raft of logs.

"Which one?" Ernie asked. "There are two Handlogger Jacksons."

"There is only ONE Handlogger Jackson," Daly said with finality.

Ever after, whether I was logging or guiding, free-lance writing or calling for my mail, there was only one Handlogger Jackson.



## Chapter 4

Ruth had no difficulty adjusting to life as a handlogger's wife. Since childhood she had lived in the bush, wherever her father and brothers were handlogging. She knew the environment and the nature of the work, and knew my appearance for meals would depend more upon the winds and tides than upon the clock.

She was never a town girl. She loved the freedom of the outdoors, where she could climb the hills and row around the inlets exploring new coves and beaches. She used our light rowboat and she always followed the shore, pushing on the oars and looking forward so she could watch around each bend for wildlife or whatever might have washed in to the beaches. Before marriage she'd had her mother or sister to go with her, so I, apprehensive lest she be lonely, took considerable time from work that first summer so we could go together, climbing the hills for

hooters, trout fishing on new streams and lakes, deer hunting or berry picking. But in time Ruth found real pleasure in going alone, and when we went in for supplies she often said if it weren't for her mother in town, she'd just camp under a spruce tree until I came back.

We went out early our second spring together. The mill needed shingle timber so in February, when I got a contract for cedar logs, we outfitted and went right away. I knew just where to get the grade of timber the mill needed: I had cruised a stand of big cedars in Bakewell Arm.

Here the terrain was ideal for my type of logging. A thick stand of cedar trees four to six feet in diameter grew on a steep slope, which angled sharply down to water several hundred feet deep. Directly across the inlet was a sheltered cove where the logs and launch would be protected from storms and drifting ice. The late winter weather had been mild and most of the snow was gone near the beach, but the ground was still frozen.

We had only one skiff, having lost the other one, but it was a short row across the inlet. If Ruth wanted to go anywhere she would put me ashore where I was working, then come back and pick me up at quitting time. Usually she took the skiff, but sometimes she would take longer trips with the launch.

When I had a tree ready to fall, I would send my favorite call rolling across the water and Ruth would come out on deck to watch the show. Then she would keep watch to see which way the tide took the log. At quitting time she would run the launch over to pick me up, and we would tow the log back to the home cove.

Often at noon, especially when Ruth was busy with something she didn't want to leave, she would come over with the launch, and when I saw her coming I would go to a place where the water was deep right up to the shore. She would ease the launch in until I could reach the bow, I'd climb aboard, and she would back out into deep water without even touching the beach. Shutting off the motor, we would drift while we ate, so there were no anchors to pull when I was ready to go ashore again.

One morning early in March we found the deck and the logs white with frost. The sky was cloudless and the unrippled surface of the inlet reflected the snow-clad peaks, their tips tinted a glowing rose by the morning sun.



We would tow them home.

Ruth took a deep breath of the sharp air and exclaimed, "What a morning for a hike! I'm going down and climb the ridge back of the seal caves."

The ridge she indicated, starting at the fork of the inlet, led back in a gentle ascent over a series of knolls to the very top of Betty Mountain. The snow would have a firm crust, ideal for climbing. She put me ashore, waved from the pilothouse, then swung the launch out and headed down the inlet.

As I climbed the hill, feeling the firm snow crust under my boots, I was glad Ruth could have such a good day for an outing. After several days of bad weather she was feeling boat-bound.

Engrossed in my work, I scarcely noticed the passing of time until I felt a pang of hunger. Time for lunch, and suddenly I realized I hadn't heard Ruth come back with the boat. She was punctual about my meals when I was working. I found a spot where I could look across to our moorage. The boat was not there.

Oh, well, I knew how she was — always wanting to look beyond just one more bend in the stream, just one more knoll on the ridge — and out there, time has a habit of slipping away unnoticed. She knew I wouldn't take it hard if she was a little late. I went on working, but kept my ear tuned for the chug of the motor.

By one o'clock I began to wonder what could be keeping her. By two o'clock I knew something had happened to delay her. But she'd planned to leave the launch at a place several miles away, and the mountain she intended to climb was on the other side of the inlet. Without a boat, I had no way to go look for her.

I tried to think of all the things that could happen. Lost? Not Ruth. Any cheechako could find the way there, as the ridge led straight back to the place where the boat would be. Besides, Ruth was a born woodsman, with a sense of direction as accurate as a compass. Fallen over a cliff? No, that was all smooth ground, not a high rock bluff or cliff anywhere. So, too, no danger of an avalanche or falling ice.

Wild animals? No. Although she was on the mainland where there could be grizzlies, they would still be in hibernation so early in the season. Wolves? Yes, but they never bothered anyone. Besides, Ruth would have her .22 rifle, so she could easily put wolves on the run. Trouble with the boat? Again, no. The anchorage was safe, we had used it many times, and Ruth knew just where to drop the hook. The engine was in perfect condition, easy to start. There had been no wind to cause the boat to drag anchor, and Ruth knew all about anchoring to allow for changing tide.

Yet she was in trouble, no question about it now, and I was powerless to help her. I stood on my springboard watching and listening, wracking my brain, trying to think what possibly could have happened.

The last tree I'd stumped in had long since drifted out of sight down the inlet. The only moving thing I could see was that pair of ravens which, I noted, made frequent trips to a dry spot beneath the overhanging cliff on the farther headland. (A few weeks later I went to that spot, and collected the five eggs which are now in the Los Angeles museum.)

At last, when I was feeling I couldn't endure the suspense another minute, I caught a faint echo and then the steady chug of



the *Alton's* engine. Ruth was coming! I hurried down to the water's edge, and when she nosed the bow in close, I clambered aboard. Wet, weary and bedraggled, she told me her story:

She had anchored the launch as planned, rowed ashore, and taken off up the ridge. A short distance up from the water the packed snow was so deep the low bushes were completely covered, but the crust made excellent traveling. Soon she reached the top of the first knoll, which gave her a good view of the inlet. But the top of the next knoll was more open and would give a better view. Beyond was another, and still another, each inviting her, each affording an even wider view.

Deer tracks were plentiful down near the beach, where the snow was thin. Farther up were a marten's tracks, and larger impressions, indistinct but probably made by a wolverine. An eagle soared overhead, and a raucous croak drew her attention to a raven. Closer at hand, a red squirrel scolded her from a spruce limb and a flock of chickadees called cheerily as they searched each and every twig. Later, echoes reverberating through the canyons announced that I had felled a tree.

At each vantage point she would stop and survey the country, at each enjoying a wider view of the inlets, the ravines and the mountains. But always a higher point beckoned. Farther and farther she climbed. The trees gradually became smaller and farther apart, until there were only a few stunted hemlocks. She discovered a lake we had not known existed. But that next knoll must be the summit, from which she could see in all directions. She moved on.

The next slope was longer and steeper. Her legs were a bit weary when she reached its top. The view was marvelous. The long, silvery inlets stretched away in three directions. On all sides were the towering peaks, their lower slopes skirted with the dark forest and gray cliffs with walls so steep no snow could ever cling. From deep, dark, mysterious canyons came the murmur of distant waterfalls.

But still she had not reached the top of the mountain. Still another, higher point invited her.

She looked toward the boat, a mere speck on the water. It was a long way down there. She hadn't realized she had come so far. Yes, she was a bit weary, but she'd have downhill going all the way. She looked longingly at the next knoll. Surely it would be the

last, the very summit of the mountain, and it was such a little way farther . . .

Suddenly a faint breath of warmth touched her cheek. Tensing, she turned to the south. A low bank of black clouds was welling up from behind the peaks. Another warm breath caressed her face, gentle but ominous as the breath of an invisible demon. Ruth turned and ran.

Down the first slope and across the first knoll she raced, down the next slope without pause. No desire now to stop and enjoy the scenery. Her one thought was to get off that mountain, to cut down the distance to the beach as fast as she possibly could.

She was yet a long way up the mountainside when she lost the race. She began to break through the snow cover. The warm chinook wind was softening the crust.

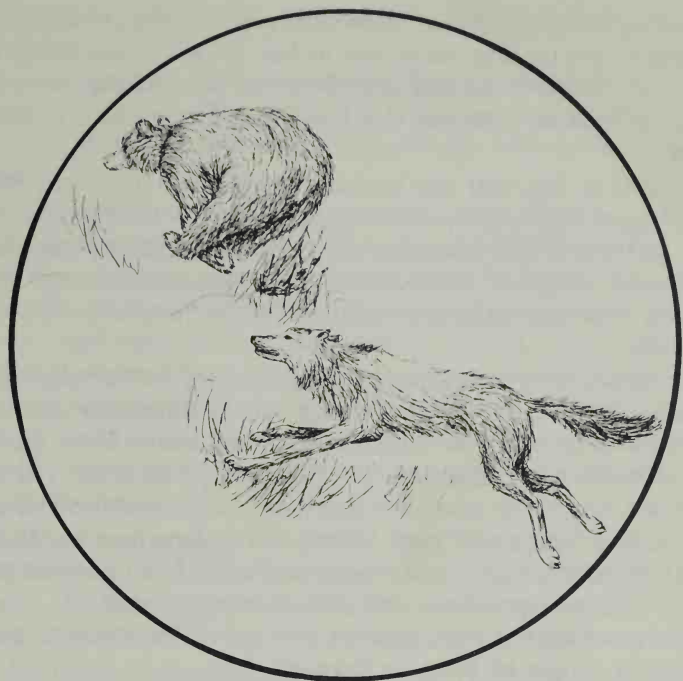
At first she would sink only to her ankles. Then, after a few steps on solid crust, another break would slow or trip her. Soon she was breaking through to her knees, then to her waist. She knew the snow was at least six feet deep, and she still had a long way to go. Now she was floundering in wet, soft snow and her breath was coming in gasps.

On a steep slope she dropped through to her armpits, scrambled out, and lay on the surface gasping for breath, too tired to get to her feet. When she tried to move she started to roll, so she relaxed and let herself roll to the bottom of the slope. Well, that was easy. The snow was as soft now as it was going to get, so she took it easy where she had to walk, and rolled down the steep places. Slow traveling, but now she knew she'd make it off the mountain.

At one place she saw a drop-off ahead, and when she tried to stop rolling, the whole snowfield started to slide. It carried her over the drop-off, and only by holding onto a small tree did she keep from being buried alive. At another place she had to chuckle at sight of a doe only a few yards away, calmly watching her roll past.

Down in the timber, the snow was packed beneath the big trees. Zigzagging from tree to tree, she reached the beach at last.

After lunch, while we were towing my tree back to the home cove, Ruth came up into the pilothouse beside me. She looked wistfully toward the smooth snowfields on the upper slopes of Betty Mountain and said, "It's so beautiful up there. You should go up sometime."



## Chapter 5

Wolves have intrigued me ever since, as a boy, I gazed wonderingly at a picture of a pack of wolves chasing two men on a sleigh, the driver lashing his horses in headlong flight, his partner shooting wolves at pointblank range, while more wolves, fangs gleaming, were closing in from all directions.

Even today in stories of the Northland you read about hearing, on moonlight nights, the hunting cry of the wolves as they chase some poor wild creature down for the kill. The storybook wolf evidently has a sporting nature; he always gives his victim warning, so they can have a good run. And he doesn't get hungry except on moonlight nights.

I first found myself in wolf country in 1912, while I was prospecting far above timberline in the mountain marmot country

of central British Columbia. There I came across the unmistakable footprints, like big dog tracks, five inches across. It was along the coast of British Columbia and Southeastern Alaska, though, where wolves are plentiful, that I was able to observe and study them.

A big wild dog that has survived persecution for more than 2,000 years and yet lives in the proximity of civilization, the wolf is, I found, the most intelligent and consequently the most interesting of all our wild animals. Long-accumulated wolf lore plus my own observations brought up a lot of questions. I wanted answers.

For instance: Do wolves always cry while they are hunting? Why does a wolf pup, born in May, fear a trap in November when he could never have seen one before? Why will a wolf stand calmly and look at you from a distance of twenty yards when you are unarmed, but run for cover at a quarter of a mile when you have a gun? A bear fears a wolf pack, I knew, but if a lone bear and a lone wolf met, which would yield the right-of-way? And of course that forever-debated question—will wolves attack people?

Fifty years among wolves didn't give me all the answers, but I did get a couple of them in Bakewell Arm.

Coming into Bakewell, we went up to the head of the inlet to anchor for the night and watch for game. It was a warm summer evening. The wide flat at the head of the arm was carpeted with lush green bear grass a foot high. Always on the watch for wild creatures, we came in slowly and quietly. Ruth was out on the bow, watching a couple of feeding black bears. When I had eased the anchor over the side and shut off the motor, I joined her. Another bear had emerged from the woods and the three were now in the center of the meadow, feeding on the grass like so many cows in a pasture.

I watched them through the glasses, then scanned the rest of the flat. In the farther corner, a fourth animal was coming along a game trail at the edge of the forest. "Four bears," I said, handing the glasses back to Ruth.

Presently she handed them to me, saying, "Take another look at that last bear. It's got a long tail."

It was out in full view now, trotting along the game trail at the edge of the spruce forest. Sure enough, though it was as black as the bears, it did have a long, bushy tail. The bears paid no

attention to it, either not noticing it or mistaking it as I had for another bear.

The wolf passed the first two bears, then turned toward the one closest to us. At fifty yards the bear saw the wolf coming. Instantly it whirled and ran for the woods, with the wolf in full chase.

Although the bear was tearing up the sod and fanning his ears with his hind feet, the wolf was at his heels in a few jumps. The bear turned on the wolf with wild haymaker swings of his mighty forepaws. The wolf danced nimbly away, giving the bear a chance to turn and make another dash for the woods. Again the wolf followed, and in a few jumps was snapping at his rear. Once more the bear turned and swung, while the aggressor taunted him, just out of reach. They continued this performance until the bear reached the woods. Then the wolf returned to its leisurely trot along the trail.

Ruth and I, handing the glasses back and forth, took in the whole show. I wouldn't have interrupted it for all the bounty in Alaska, for that unscheduled drama gave me an answer which none of the old-time hunters or trappers had known.

After the wolf disappeared up the creek, I took my rifle and went ashore to see whether I could collect some bounty. I was just securing the skiff when the wolf came trotting out onto the flat again, stopped, and stood eyeing me intently. It was a long shot, but at the crack of the .30-'06 the wolf dropped and lay still—one of the few clean wolf kills I ever made.

Knowing that a wolf is hard to put down and keep down, I watched it a long time before I felt I dared take my eyes off it and row over to the other side of the creek where it lay. To my surprise, it was a young female.

Here was proof beyond my expectation. The bear was a full grown male and yet, confronted by a yearling female wolf, he had immediately panicked.

That wolf was not attacking in earnest, she was having an evening romp at the bear's expense. Twice later, however, I found evidence of deadly serious attacks. Twice, examining the remains of wolf kills, I found only the skull and heavily furred hide of bears, enough in each case to identify the victim as a mature male in prime condition.





Wolves are plentiful in Southeast Alaska.

The next spring, also in Bakewell Arm, we found another answer: In real life there's no such thing as the hunting cry of the wolf.

March first broke bright and clear. The glistening snow peaks stood out in finely sculptured detail against a deep blue sky in the frosty air, and a skim of fresh ice covered the bay. Ruth came out on deck, tested the thickness of the ice in the water bucket, sniffed the air, and looked longingly toward shore.

"My," she said, "what a day for a hike!"

"Where to?" I asked as I continued to sharpen my falling ax.

"We could go up to the lake, just for exercise."

"I hadn't noticed any lack of exercise," I said, and went on whetting the ax.

“And we could try the trout fishing at the mouth of the lake.”

Ruth always knows how to win her point. Last week's heavy, warm rain had cleaned the snow off the trees and packed it on the ground, and last night's freeze would have crusted it to make fine traveling. I looked at the sheet of ice that extended clear across the bay. It would be three hours before the tide changed and took the ice out so I could row over to my work. I put down the ax.

Bakewell Lake, one of the best cutthroat producers in the vicinity, lay just beyond that low ridge. It had been a long time since I'd fished through the ice. Oh, I had no intention of chopping a hole through the ice. It would be thick after such a cold winter as we'd had. But the creek had been high during the rain and the lake would be open at the outlet. I hunted up the fishing tackle.

When I went into the galley, Ruth was stuffing something into her pocket that looked suspiciously like lunch. I planned to be back for work by the time the ice moved out, but I said nothing. Ruth always took a lunch, and we always ate it and wished we had more.

In summer we followed the grown-over blazes of the old trapper's trail, a meandering route that dodged thick brush patches, skirted pond-lily puddles and avoided soft muskegs. Now the underbrush was flattened under four feet of packed snow and the timber, scattered yellow cedar and bull pine, was as open as a park. The muskegs were like little frozen lakes, propped up at one end.

Disregarding the blazed trail, we started straight up the hill and in a surprisingly short time were at the top of the ridge. There we stopped to look around.

From our right came the rumble of the falls, where the water from the lake plunges forty feet into a rocky canyon on its way to the sea. Behind us, at the foot of the hill, was the dark water of the inlet. Across the inlet was the steep, forested slope of the mountain, rising abruptly from deep water to the bare, rocky pinnacles where we'd seen the mountain goats last fall. That patch of lighter green was the stand of red cedar where I was cutting logs, and that overhanging bluff just beyond was where the ravens had their nest.

But we looked at that every day. Now the opposite direction interested us. Down a short slope was the lake, still sleeping

quietly beneath its blankets of ice and snow. Between rolling, forest-clad hills it reached back four miles, to disappear around a shoulder of the mountain. How much farther it went, we didn't know, as there was no boat on the lake and this was before any air mapping had been done in Alaska. Now was our chance to find out.

What interested us most right now, however, was the narrows, half a mile up from the outlet, where the lake was pinched between two rocky knolls. The high water from the rains had cut out the ice there and we could see open water. The lake was deep there. If the trout were biting, that would be the place to get them.

Down at the lake, we found it had flooded, settling and packing the snow that covered the ice, and the frost had firmed it so we sank in no more than half an inch—just enough for good tracking. At the edge of the open water at the narrows we found the solid blue ice four feet thick, with a foot of packed snow on top of it. I was certainly glad we could fish without chopping a hole through that.

I lowered the hook. Presently a large trout came very slowly out from under the ice, opened his mouth wide and sucked in the bait. He didn't even give an extra kick when I set the hook, and he was sluggish as a spent dog salmon when I pulled him out—a plump nineteen-inch cutthroat.

A few minutes later Ruth caught a seventeen-incher. Both were as plump as any we ever have caught, and the meat, as red as the flesh of a bright silver salmon, was fine-flavored. Ruth's too was sluggish. They'd been dormant under the ice for four months. I guess they weren't really awake yet.

As no more trout came to the bait, we struck out to see where the lake went.

We had gone a couple of miles when a large black wolf came out of the timber 200 yards ahead and crossed to the other side of the lake, traveling in that easy trot which covers a lot of distance in a short time. We stood still until he was out of sight in the woods across the lake, then went to look at his tracks in the snow. They were following the fresh tracks of a deer, keeping about three feet to one side all the way.

We went on until we could see the head of the lake, then turned back. The sun was high in the sky now and its glare on the wide snowfield was dazzling. When Ruth complained of eye strain I

realized the danger of snowblindness, so I tore strips from the black lining of my coat, cut small holes for us to see through, and tied the strips over our eyes. Thus masked like a couple of burglars, we walked on in comfort.

Halfway back to the narrows, walking down the center of the lake, we heard a clatter of hooves on the crusted snow and a deer came dashing out of the forest, running for its life, with the black wolf close behind. Out on that level snowfield we could see every move clearly.

When the deer reached the center of the lake the wolf closed in with a great burst of speed, and slashed it in the hindquarters. The deer staggered but kept running. Instantly the wolf swung out about twenty feet and, running abreast of the deer, kept it in a big circle out on the ice. Halfway around the circle the deer began to stagger, then stumbled and went down. The wolf came straight in on it, but the deer scrambled to its feet. The wolf jumped back to take its position, twenty feet outside. Another short run, and again the deer stumbled and went down. Again the wolf darted in. The chase was over.

We came on then and were within a 150 yards before the wolf appeared to notice us. Then, turning to face us with head lowered, it eyed us intently. We kept walking toward it. At a hundred yards it moved a little to the left, then back to the deer. We came on without a pause. The wolf moved a few steps to the right, then back to its kill.

Ruth plucked my sleeve. "He's not going to leave," she whispered. "We'd better not get any closer."

I was thinking we were too close already, less than fifty yards, and the nearest tree half a mile away. No gun, nothing but the trout rod and the pencil-size stick Ruth had picked up for a walking stick. Worse still, though it's just possible I didn't think of it as worse until later, I'd never been so close to a live wolf before, and no camera!

Too late now to retreat or show any sign of intimidation, I decided, so I kept on walking, with Ruth mighty close behind. At forty yards the wolf lost its nerve and trotted back into the woods. I was as glad as Ruth was to see it go.

In the bright sunlight, out there in the open, we'd witnessed every move in the drama, but I got a clearer picture when I followed and studied the tracks in the snow.



Deer and wolf came out of the woods at the same spot. Racing out across the lake, the deer was averaging twelve feet to each jump while the wolf was averaging fifteen feet. The wolf's first slash hit the deer in the thickest part of the right ham, cutting it clear to the bone and severing an artery. Knowing its victim was crippled, the wolf didn't close in again while the deer was on its feet, but kept far out on the ice until it weakened and fell.

The deer was a big buck, antlerless and thin. Its throat was ripped clear to the bone, but only the end of its nose was eaten.

As we were leaving the wolf came out again, and when we saw it last it was far up the lake, following our tracks as it had followed the tracks of the deer. The afternoon sun was softening the crust,



so we stopped to rest at the top of the ridge. Then, from far up the shore of the lake, there came the long, eerie, spine-chilling howl of the wolf. Three times it echoed among the hills, then all was silent. No other vocal sound did we hear from that wolf all day. We had in fact noticed the deathly silence of the chase. The only sounds were those of flying feet on crusted snow.

Twice afterward I watched wolves chase down deer to the kill. Another time, wolves ran down and killed a deer within a hundred yards of me. And once a pack of wolves charged down and surrounded Ruth and me. Every time they were as silent as shadows.

So, another question was answered to my satisfaction: The "hunting cry" of the wolf is heard only in the mind of the story-writer, and he might as well tell us a tomcat yowls when he's about to pounce on a mouse.

When we got home that day it was too late to go back, but next morning I took my rifle and some traps and went up to the lake. The wolf was nowhere in sight, though tracks showed it had returned to the deer at least a dozen times and more than half the carcass was eaten. I made some good snow sets around what was left, but the wolf never came near it again.

After the ice went out of the lake, the wolf moved down to the beach. We saw its fresh tracks often. One day Ruth, wanting to wash clothes, rowed the skiff over to the mouth of the creek to get fresh water. The creek came out across the flat in a long, narrow channel. At the head of the channel she filled her tubs by dipping up the clear, running water. Then she straightened up and there, on the low bank not twenty feet away, head down, yellow eyes gleaming, a wolf stood watching her. The water under the skiff was not more than a foot deep, no deterrent to the wolf if it chose to join Ruth in the skiff. She grabbed the oars and headed out of there as fast as she could row. The wolf followed along the creek bank, clear down to the deep water of the bay, then stood watching as she hurried back to the launch.

Ruth came aboard and told me to get the rifle, as the wolf was in easy range. I snatched the loaded rifle from the rack and hurried to the door. No wolf. Then we saw it, in full flight, just going into the woods at the farthest corner of the flat.

That wolf was getting too bold, so I set a trap for it. Wherever possible we set our traps under water to eliminate the human

scent. I found just the right place out in the middle of the flat—a shallow pool in the creek beside a big, sunken stump. Baited with seal meat and fastened securely to the stump with large spikes, the trap was waiting for the wolf's next trip to the beach.

Ruth often went up to look at the trap while I was working. One day she found it clogged with floating debris, and somehow, as she tried to clear it, the jaws snapped on her finger. Wolf traps are big and strong, with teeth lining their jaws, and when we set them we had to use clamps.

Being empty-handed, Ruth could not spring the trap enough to free her finger, nor could she get it loose from the stump. She tried standing on the springs. The trap merely sank into the sand, while one of its teeth bit deeper into her finger. But that was not the worst part of her predicament. At high tide the water over the stump would be ten feet deep, and the tide was coming in fast. Ruth couldn't hope for help from me, as I was working in the woods a mile away and wouldn't be back for hours.

Ruth looked at the rising water, only inches from her now, braced her feet against the trap, gritted her teeth, and pulled. Her finger came free, though it was badly lacerated.

A week later Ruth announced that the trap had caught its intended victim. We recognized it as the one we had watched up on the lake, killing the deer. An old female, she weighed more than a hundred pounds and she was jet black except for a narrow stripe of gray along her back—the same color and very likely the mother of the one I'd shot earlier, after we'd seen her teasing the bear. The old one always had traveled and hunted alone. We didn't see another wolf track there all summer.



## Chapter 6

Ruth and I seldom had an "ordinary" hike in the woods. Something almost always happened to turn a hike into an adventure. Like the time we went up Clearwater Creek in Bakewell Arm.

On the map this was just another unnamed mountain stream flowing into the bay near the place where I was working. Its waters were crystal clear, so we called it Clearwater to distinguish it from the several red-water streams nearby.

We had fished the lower part of this stream without success. The fall before, while I was hunting, I'd found a late run of silver salmon congregated in some deep pools an hour's hike upstream, and I'd been wondering ever since whether there would be rainbow trout in the pools with the salmon.

A bright, sunny day in mid-November seemed like a good time to go find out. It hadn't rained for several days, so the bush would be dry and the creek low. True, the snow line was creeping down the mountains, and the last few mornings had been frosty. The ponds in the duck pastures were coated with ice and the creek water, draining down from the snowfields, would be cold. Maybe so cold that the trout, if there were any, wouldn't bite. Anyway, it was a good day for a hike.

Ruth usually went along on such trips and of course I preferred her company, but she was not feeling well so I assumed she shouldn't take a chance on getting wet.

"I'm going with you," she said when I announced my plan. She was not hinting for an invitation, she was stating a fact. "I'll wear warm clothes and hip boots," she added when I looked doubtful.

Well, I couldn't keep her home without calling off the trip, and most likely it would be raining again tomorrow. Besides, who was I to say what was good for her? She was already pulling on her boots. I got out the fishing tackle.

As usual, Ruth insisted I take a gun. We hadn't seen a bear around the Clearwater for nearly a month, and they should all be denned up by now. Occasionally, though, we'd encounter a bear when the winter was well along, especially on a creek with a late run of salmon. A gun is a nuisance on a fishing trip, when you need one arm to carry the rod and a string of trout and the other to paw the brush aside, but to save argument I got the big rifle.

Ruth took her berry bucket, which was also usual on our trout fishing trips. We carried only one rod, and while one of us fished, the other picked berries. This was too late in the season for any berries except the wild black currants. They hang on the bushes long after all the leaves have fallen, and we hoped the bears had overlooked a few.

The Clearwater comes down a valley of big spruce timber. The lower part, logged off years before, was now overgrown with a thick tangle of salmonberry and wild currant brush threaded with a maze of bear trails. Most of these could be traveled only as the bears do, down on all four—which doesn't encourage two-legged animals to travel any great distance. But the low water in the creek had exposed a series of open gravel bars that offered excellent traveling, though frequent crossings were necessary.

- These we made by wading the riffles, which were knee-deep and thirty or forty feet wide.

About half a mile upstream we were surprised to find a pair of large Dolly Varden trout spawning in one of the riffles. Like most Alaskans, we didn't think highly of Dollies, but when they come that size they offer good sport.

Ruth made a long cast, dropping the spinner above and beyond the trout. As the lure came flashing by, the male dashed for it and the battle was on. Down over the riffle and in the pool below, he put up a stiff fight before Ruth was able to bring him in. He was a real beauty, with his pink spots and bright orange fins edged with white, and a full twenty inches long.

It was one of our rules to keep the first trout always, so we hung this one on a limb out of reach of the mink, who love to steal your fish as soon as your back is turned. We'd pick it up on the way home.

We found another pair of big Dollies at the next riffle, and now it was my turn. Again it was the male that struck, and like the first one, as soon as he found himself hooked he ran down to the deep pool below. Our Dollies are not surface fighters; they seldom jump, they fight down on the bottom in the deepest place they can find. These were in prime condition and showed a surprising amount of stamina.

We found a pair or two of Dollies on every riffle, and so we went up the creek, taking turns fishing and looking for berries. The currant crop had been good, as we could see by the stems, but the bear had stripped every bush on the banks, leaving us only those that hung out over the water. By wading out knee-deep or deeper we were getting a good picking of currants.

While I was releasing a Dolly, Ruth started on ahead with the bucket. At the first bend she backed up hurriedly, saying, "There's a bear! Coming this way! Where's the gun?"

It was leaning against a tree down where she'd caught the first fish. Seeing my guilty look, she said, "Yes, I know. I saw you put it behind that tree."

I hurried up and looked around the bend. There was a bear, all right, a big black male, coming our way with only forty yards more to come. I stepped out in plain sight and shouted. The bear stopped, pricked up his ears, wiggled his nose, then came on. I



moved a few steps to attract his attention, then waved my arms and shouted again.

He should have taken to the woods, but this bear wasn't playing according to the rules. He stopped again, sniffed the breeze, then came on, looking straight at us. I yelled enough to scare ten bears, and I was almost ready to curse myself for leaving the gun behind, when Ruth took action. She dumped the currants out of the bucket, threw a handful of gravel into it, and shook it vigorously. The bear stopped. Ruth shook the bucket again, and she put plenty of energy into the shaking.

The bear hesitated so long I knew he was bluffed out, so I told him sternly to get the hell out of there and he obeyed, sulking off into the woods with his ears laid back like a Missouri mule. We wouldn't see him again, but we waited a few minutes before we went on upstream.

November days are short in Alaska. Suddenly realizing we'd have to keep moving if we were to get to the salmon pools and back before dark, we gave up on the Dolly fishing.

We were nearing the pools when we came to a place where a spruce tree four feet in diameter had fallen across the creek. About half the creek water was flowing over the top of the log in a thin fall, into a deep pool which had a strange boiling up of water in its middle. From the upstream side of the log we could see the cause of the boiling. Gravel, washed down by freshets, had piled up against the log to the level of its upper side. Then the water had broken through underneath, washing out a funnel-shaped crater in the loose gravel, and half the water of the creek was pouring under the log through this crater.

We had to cross here if we were to go on upstream. Wading in knee-deep water just above the crater, I stopped to look at it. The clear water was forming a whirlpool as it swept through the crater, and under its vortex, six feet down, I could see that it strained through the closely spaced limbs on the under side of the log. With a shudder I moved on.

Just then I heard a choked-off shout, and turned back in time to see Ruth being sucked into the vortex of the whirlpool. I grabbed, and caught her just as her hair was going under.

Evidently she had stepped too close to the rim of the crater and the gravel had caved in under her feet, dropping her into the whirlpool. The current was so strong it would have held her down



One of the new trout streams we tried.

against the spruce limbs, and no human body could have passed through those limbs into the pool beyond. It was the deadliest water trap I have ever seen.

Fortunately the gravel held firm under me while I pulled Ruth out. My first thought was to get a fire going immediately, but as I looked around for dry wood I saw that the sun was alarmingly close to the mountaintops. Before we could get a fire built and dry Ruth's clothes, it would be dark, and we were a long way from the beach with no trail to follow. The wind, beginning to blow down from the snow peaks, brought a definite chill.

I looked at Ruth, water streaming from her clothes and hair, her teeth chattering. We had to get moving, and fast. She poured the water out of her boots and we struck out. We didn't pause to look for Dollies or berries or anything else. I did snatch up the rifle as we hurried along, but forgot all about Ruth's Dolly hanging on the limb. She hinted that I'd left it on purpose so I could go fishing again, but my mind was on picking the easiest, fastest route home.

Ruth suffered no ill effects from her dip in the icy water. In fact, as soon as she was warm and dry, she felt fine. We never did get up to those pools to look for the rainbows.



## Chapter 7

The depression of the 1930's was slow in coming to Alaska, but when it did hit, it hit hard. In the spring of 1931 the price we got for our winter's catch of fur was disheartening, we couldn't give away a bear hide, and the sawmills shut down so I couldn't get a contract for logs.

It's no fun being in town broke, so we stayed out as much as possible. Except for an occasional mouldering trapper's shack and a few stumps and patches of second-growth hemlock where the timber had been logged, the back country was little changed since the first white man ventured into it. Out there, we could get by fairly easily. If our clothes were faded and patched, who cared? The hills echoed with the booming hoot of the blue grouse, and there were plenty of deer in season—and if you were out in the back country, broke, deer were always in season. We wouldn't go hungry.

In our more prosperous years, however, we had formed a taste for store grub, and that took cash.

In mid-March of '31, living aboard the *Alton*, we were trapping wolves in the inlets of the mainland. Although the hides were almost worthless, the Territory was paying a bounty of ten dollars apiece on wolves, and that was real money during the depression years.

One morning we cruised up to the mouth of Wilson River at the head of Smeaton Bay. At low tide the river comes down across a mile of tidal flats in a series of shallow riffles and whitewater rapids, but at high tide the shallows are covered to a depth of several feet. We could run up the river at high tide, to a deep pool back in the timber where the launch could lie anchored in ten feet of water. Of course, we couldn't get her back out over the riffles except at high tide.

This morning the tide was high, so we decided to run up to the pool and anchor. We had seen wolves there. Perhaps we could get a shot at one.

Several pairs of Canada geese, disturbed by our approach, flapped into the air and circled away, honking in irritation. These flats were a favorite spot of mine for fall bird hunting, but I had no eyes for birds now. I had to pay strict attention to my navigating—following the winding course of the river between submerged sand bars and flooded islands, dodging the stranded stumps upon which the geese would be nesting later.

We found the river frozen solid with eighteen inches of ice, which ended at the upper end of the pool, leaving plenty of room for the boat. I ran her up to the edge so we could simply step off onto solid ice, then chopped a hole in the ice and planted the anchor. We were as snug as if tied to a dock.

Ruth, always ready for a hike, suggested we walk up the frozen river and look for game tracks in the snow along the banks. I got the gun. Then she suggested we have lunch first, so we could go as far and stay as long as we liked. We'd have a better chance of seeing game if we were coming back downstream in the evening.

We had finished lunch and were sitting at the galley table discussing what footgear Ruth would need, when I glanced out the window. "Look at the trees go by!" I shouted, and dashed for the door, Ruth at my heels.



We were drifting downstream, fast. How could the anchor have come loose? I looked upstream. It was the ice, not the anchor: the river ice was coming down. Broken into big pans, from bank to bank as far upstream as I could see, and driven by the swift river current, the ice was sweeping down at us.

The tide was running out, too. Already the water on that first riffle was mighty thin. Surely we couldn't get across it—but we couldn't stay here! That ice would smash the boat to splinters.

Ruth started the engine, I retrieved the anchor, and we headed down the river with the ice close behind us, crunching and grinding, tearing big chunks out of the banks, shoving great slabs up onto dry ground.

I braced myself as we crossed that first riffle, but we made it, and kept right on going.

"It's a good thing we couldn't afford to paint the hull," Ruth chuckled as we headed out into Smeaton Bay. "One more coat of paint would have hung her up on that first riffle."

"It's a good thing you decided we should eat," I replied. "If we hadn't stayed aboard, we'd be coming down with that ice. And no boat, if we did get down alive."

It was Cy Wykoff, the forest ranger, who first credited us with living the life of Riley. Visiting us while I was handlogging, he looked over my growing raft of top-grade spruce logs, then noticed the freshly gathered goose-tongue greens and the bucket of butter clams on the deck. When Ruth showed him the creel of plump rainbow trout she had just caught, he remarked, "You two sure are living the life of Riley!"

We heard the same comment from others—town people, naturally, who pictured us basking in the sun on deck, beach-picnicking in a scenic wonderland of sparkling waters and majestic mountains, lazing beside some shady pool watching the trout leap and hearing the song of the water ouzel.

What kind of life this Riley character actually lived, we didn't know and none of our town friends could tell us, but if it was anything like ours, he took a share of punishment along with his sunbathing, leaping trout and songbird serenades. Many times, out in the back country, as we strained every muscle at some back-breaking task, pitted our wits and our bare hands against the threat of imminent disaster, or faced the icy blasts of a winter gale and mountainous seas intent upon pounding our small craft to

kindling against the shore rocks, our burden was lightened, our courage bolstered, our spirits lifted, by our reminding each other that "Riley pulled through it, so can we."

We continued our wolf trapping with varying success. Where we had seen wolves when we didn't need them to boil the pot, we'd get nothing, and then we'd catch one in some unlikely spot. Wolves are like that. Any man who says he caught a wolf where he expected to catch a wolf is . . . well, he's either lucky or a liar.

One evening we came into the anchorage in Shoalwater Pass to stay while I caught up on some chores. I had a wolf to skin and some wolf pelts to stretch and dry. They smell like the concentrated essence of wet dog, so I took them ashore to work on whenever I could. We needed fuel, too. Coal cost money, but there was plenty of wood along the beaches, free for the cutting.

After I finished the wolf hides, Ruth went with me to cut wood. As we rowed ashore we noticed that the water in the cove was alive with herring. I was sawing and Ruth, sitting on the log, was chattering away, when she stopped in midsentence and turned an ear toward the mountain.

"Listen!" she said, her eyes sparkling, "A hooter!"

I quit sawing. From back in the hills of the mainland came a deep-throated woop-woop-woop. That deceptive booming hoot of the blue grouse was always irresistible to Ruth. Like the prospector and his gold, the challenge was to find the bird.

"I'm going after him!" she announced.

Well, why not? I'd be there the rest of the day, and if I got hungry I could always find something to eat. As for Ruth, she'd rather hunt hooters any day than eat.

She had just stepped into the skiff to row out for her .22, when, from up the pass, there came two explosive exhausts. Startled, we turned, and saw twin jets of vapor, then two long, curved black dorsal fins, then, rising beneath them, the shining black humps of a couple of killer whales. They had scarcely submerged when four more appeared, then more behind them, and still more, until we counted twenty-eight killer whales in that one pod.

They turned into our cove. Ruth got out of the skiff fast and came up beside me. Finding the herring, the killers went after them in a frenzy of excitement. Diving, coming up and blowing, dorsal fins and flukes flashing in the bright sunlight, back and



Ruth enjoyed hunting for hooters.

forth, round and round, splashing and snorting, they churned the bay to a foam.

They were working between the *Alton*, anchored just offshore, and the beach where we stood. We could have taken wonderful pictures but the camera was on the boat, and we were not about to row out after it just then.

When they had consumed or scattered the herring, the killers moved out and, from sheer exuberance or to settle their dinner, began to romp. Some would come up full length, stand on their flukes, then fall with a mighty splash that sent a geyser of water high into the air. Some would leap clear out of the water and come down with a resounding crash that echoed from the hills.

Imagine those eight- and ten-ton acrobats rising full-length out of the water, one after another, standing full-length on the surface like gleaming black-and-white columns twenty to thirty feet tall, then toppling onto the water in a series of thunderous crashes. We watched as if hypnotized. Broke we were, yes, but what man's wealth could buy him a ringside view of such a spectacle?

At last the killers tired of their sport and moved on. When Ruth was sure they were not coming back, she rowed out for her rifle and took off up the hill.

She gained the crest of the first ridge, where she thought her grouse was, but now it seemed the hooting came from the second ridge. When she got to the second ridge she found it was still farther back. Such is the carrying power of the hoot of the blue grouse.

But it was a bright, sunny spring day. The snow was just gone and the green shoots of wildflowers were pushing out of the ground. All this, to Ruth, was reason enough to go hiking.

Across open tundras she went, up more brushy ridges, and always from somewhere up ahead, without any apparent increase in volume, that tantalizing hoot continued. At last, at the top of a steep rise, she came to a very tall, limby spruce. Somewhere up among its thick branches perched the grouse, sending forth its booming call.

Round and round the tree Ruth went, close to the trunk and far out beyond the screening branches, peering through every opening in the foliage, searching limb by limb, while the hooting continued at regular intervals. Sometimes it would seem to come from the tree to the right, then from the tree to the left, but Ruth, an old hand at grouse hunting, was not to be fooled.

At last, through a tiny opening in the thick foliage, she spotted the grouse on one of the highest branches, 150 feet from the ground. She took careful aim and fired. The grouse dropped like a rock, hit the ground with a thud, then started its characteristic fluttering, which took it rolling down the hill.

The excitement of the hunt over, Ruth noticed how low the sun was. The bottom of the hill, where her grouse had rolled, was already in deep shadow. She looked at her watch and was alarmed. She hadn't realized how long she'd been following the call of the grouse. She'd have to pick it up and hurry home, as it would soon be dusk and she was a long way from the beach.

Following the trail of feathers, she hurried down the hill. There, on a flat, open piece of ground, the trail ended abruptly. No more feathers, no grouse. What had become of it? When they flutter like that, they don't fly away; they're dead. It had to be right there, but it wasn't. Nothing was there—nothing but the silence of the deep forest.

That silence was suddenly shattered by a piercing scream, then another, and another, from somewhere nearby. Ruth's first thought was "Wild man," the only thing she and her brothers, as children, had feared in the woods. She fled for home.

My chores on the beach were finished and I was wondering what was keeping Ruth so long, when she burst out of the woods, her face flushed, hair flying wildly, the tail of her jacket sticking straight back.

That evening, as Ruth described her experience, I was as mystified as she. We discussed and discarded every possibility we could think of. Next morning I took my rifle and followed her back up the hill.

"Right here is where I stood when I heard it," she said when at last she stopped.

There was the trail of feathers, ending at our feet. A falling grouse often rolls into a hole beneath a log or stump, but here there were no logs, no stumps, not even a bush. Scrutinizing the ground, I went around in widening circles. There were Ruth's tracks in flight, and ours as we had just come. Finally I found a depression in the moss.

"Some soft-footed creature," I said after studying the print. "Too big for a wolf. A wolverine, or a bear—or your wild man."

I found another track and another, leading in the direction from which Ruth had heard the screams, but the ground was hard and covered with a carpet of green moss, which had now sprung back so there was not a distinct print to tell what creature had made it. With my nose practically to the ground, carefully searching out the trail, I followed it into the woods while Ruth kept watch close behind.

"There's a den!" she exclaimed, pointing.

Straightening up, I saw a hole under the roots of a cedar tree, on the brink of a knoll just high enough that we could not see inside. Not knowing what to expect, we approached carefully and stopped at a respectful distance. I shouted. Nothing appeared.

A tree had fallen with its top protruding in front of the den. Walking out on the tree so I could look into the den, I saw a patch of black fur striped with silver, undulating gently.

The black and silver had me puzzled. I shouted and whistled several times. Although I was not more than ten feet away, the fur



didn't move except for the rhythmic up-and-down of breathing. Curiosity overcoming my caution, I climbed the steep bank and peeped into the den. There lay a tiny black bear cub, striped with silver by patches of sunlight that filtered through the roots.

The picture was clear now. Mama bear was out foraging for supper when the grouse came fluttering down the hill like a gift from heaven. Just as she snatched it, along came Ruth. Mama bear, though not forgetting the grouse, hurried to her cub and, as mothers of young cubs usually do when danger threatens, spanked it to make it climb a tree to safety. The cub, unaccustomed to such treatment, screamed in protest. No wonder Ruth, alone with the early evening shadows in the deep, silent forest, had panicked. The cry of a bear cub has a definitely human sound, and is most startling when heard unexpectedly in the wilderness.

Mama bear was evidently out foraging again. If she should come home and find us there, we might have to shoot her to save our own skins. We withdrew quietly, then had a good laugh at Ruth's "wild man."

Later, in town, when I told the story, a listener offered me ten dollars if I'd bring him the cub for a pet. I replied that I'd speak to my wife, as it was her cub.

"You tell him we'll never be *that* hard up!" Ruth said when I mentioned the offer. "That cub belongs right where it is."

Leaving Shoalwater Pass, we went on up Behm Canal and stopped at Checats Cove to look at a wolf trap. A bear had stolen the bait. He'd be back, and if he got caught he'd either break the trap or run off with it. I took up the trap.

Just as we left Checats a big school of porpoises came charging at us from the direction of New Eddystone Rock. We always enjoyed watching them play around the boat and we usually didn't bother them. This time, however, I was badly in need of bait for the wolf traps, so I shot a porpoise and, luckily, managed to retrieve it before it sank. It took both of us to pull it up onto the deck. Now I had plenty of bait.

In the Saltwater Punchbowl, our next stop, I had a wolverine in my trap. He was the maddest animal I ever saw. It's a good thing the wolverine isn't as big as a bear, or no one would dare go into the woods where they live.

Our route led to the end of Rudyerd Bay, one of those glaciated chasms carved out of solid granite, winding for miles back into the mountains of the mainland. It was like entering a region a thousand miles farther north. Shut in by high granite walls, this fjord had not yet thrown off the grip of winter. All the higher elevations were solid white, except where the cliffs were too steep for the snow to cling. Snow patches still reached down to the water's edge, and where avalanches had poured down from the peaks, the snow was twenty feet deep.

Watching the shore as we cruised up the inlet, we saw a mountain goat standing on a spot of bare ground not twenty yards from salt water. Quietly we ran the boat over and took some pictures of him from the bow. When we backed away he was still standing there, quietly chewing his cud.

My last wolf trap was at the very head of Rudyerd Bay, on the flat at the mouth of the river. This vast tidal flat was studded with sunken stumps that had washed downriver, but up one side of the flat was a wide channel. As we were anxious to get back down the fjord, and the tide was high, I ran the *Alton* up the channel half the length of the flat before dropping anchor. Thus I would save time rowing up to the trap and back.

I approached that trap with keen expectation, but was disappointed. A wolverine had found it, cleverly removed the covering I had placed over it with great care, then stolen the bait.

I spent more time at the trap than I'd expected, so the tide was falling fast when I got back to the launch. Our anchorage would be a shallow riffle in the river at low tide, so we had no time to lose. Calling to Ruth to start the engine, I went to the bow and lifted the anchor.

That engine was the old heavy-duty type. You had to give it a good drink to prime it, and then you rolled the flywheel and hoped it would respond. But if you primed too much or too little, you rolled the wheel and you rolled it some more, and then, if you were a man, you cussed a bit.

Ruth primed, rolled the flywheel, primed again, while I sat up at the steering wheel watching her and kidding her about being a poor engineer. Finally, after she discovered the priming can was empty and refilled it, the engine took off with an impatient snort and I turned the boat around to head for the open bay.

If only I'd been looking out the window instead of watching Ruth, we'd have been all right. I'd have noticed we were drifting sidewise in a big eddy that was taking us out of the channel, over onto the stump-cluttered flat. But I didn't notice and, as we had come straight in from the bay, I headed straight out. Suddenly the bow of the boat started rising and we slid to a stop. I knew at once what had happened. We were off our course and we'd run up onto one of the submerged stumps. Throwing the clutch into reverse, I opened the engine wide. We didn't budge.

I still had a chance to free us. Taking the pike pole, I shoved the stern around. If the boat was hung up on a log, she would slide off when the keel and the log became parallel. The stern moved readily for a short way, then came to a solid stop. I shoved the stern the other way. Again it moved easily, then stopped. She was not on a log. We were stuck.

Luckily, being a logger, I had a good, sharp ax handy. I threw it into the skiff, rowed to the shore two hundred yards away, cut two stout saplings, and towed them back to the boat. She was grounded on something almost amidship. The bow kept rising as the tide receded, and the stern went down.

Now the water around us was getting shallow, the bow was almost out of the water, and the boat rolled as we moved about. If she rolled over she'd be smashed, or at best she would fill with water and sink when the tide came in again.

We both realized our predicament. The boat was our means of making a living, as well as our home, and everything we possessed was aboard. We'd just been in town, so it would be a month before anyone would wonder about us, and we were fifty miles from the nearest human being, in a spot so isolated it might be several months before anyone happened along.

With the boat threatening to roll over any minute, I cut the saplings to fit, planted one under the guard on each side, and hoped. They might hold the boat upright—if we were lucky. Meanwhile Ruth was throwing bedding, groceries and articles of value into the skiff. By the time I finished she had the skiff piled with all it would hold, and the position of the boat was so precarious we were not safe aboard. We could do no more, so we rowed ashore, found a spot of bare ground under a spruce, and built a fire.

Beach picnics are supposed to be a lark, but I had little appetite for the supper Ruth cooked over our campfire that evening. Anxiously I watched the *Alton* as darkness settled and she became a vague shadow out on the flat, apparently still upright. She would still be settling, so we stayed a while longer by the fire.

When I considered it safe we launched the skiff, took the gasoline lantern Ruth had thoughtfully brought ashore, and crossed the river to investigate. The tide had gone far out beyond our range of vision, leaving the flat a smooth field of firm sand. We found the *Alton* perched on a huge stump which lay on its side, half buried in the sand, with the stubs of two roots sticking up and the keel wedged firmly between them. No wonder I couldn't swing her around. The stern was settled in the sand, the bow pitched high in the air, so I, standing under the bow, could barely touch the bottom of the keel with my fingertips.

But she was upright and unharmed. She had taken on no water with the outgoing tide, so she should rise nicely and float clear when the tide came back in. We felt the ordeal was over. Still, we'd have hours to wait for the tide, and we were tired.

Gingerly I climbed aboard and tried to shake the boat. She was as solid as if in drydock. I went down into the cabin. Though tipped at quite an angle, it was dry and much more comfortable than the camp on the beach. We got our belongings and moved back aboard.

It was near midnight when we got to bed. Dead tired after the long, trying day and reassured by the knowledge that, once we were afloat, we would have at least three safe hours before the outgoing tide might endanger us again, I fell into a sound sleep.

It seemed only minutes later that Ruth shook me, saying, "I hear water running."

I sprang out of bed and landed in water halfway to my knees. Rushing out on deck, I found that the tide had covered the flats and come halfway up the afterdeck, pouring in through the tiller slot in the cockpit combing.

Grabbing a couple of empty coal sacks, I stuffed them into the slot, then secured the cockpit cover, threw off the main hatch cover, and began bailing with the deck bucket. Ruth worked the hand pump. Barefooted and barelegged, just as we had been as we jumped out of bed, we bailed and pumped frantically, then

changed places and pumped and bailed. Enough water was still coming in that, though we worked as fast as we possibly could, we were just barely holding our own. Then we weren't. The cockpit cover submerged. Water flowed up over the deck, crept up the combing of the main hatch. If it started running into the hatch, we were licked: we couldn't possibly save the boat.

"Strange it's so warm on a clear night like this," Ruth remarked.

Glancing around quickly, I noted that the clouds were gone and the sky was ablaze with stars. But I had no breath to reply, no time for the beauty of the starlit sky. I'd noticed something Ruth must have missed. My eyes glued on that rising water line, now just one inch from the top of the hatch combing, I was putting all I had into the bailing.

Was I imagining it in my anxiety, or had the water line stopped rising? No . . . yes . . . it held for a few moments just short of spilling into the hatch, then, barely perceptibly, it began to lower. The boat was starting to lift. If we could hold out for a few more minutes . . .

That's when Ruth, whose sense of humor never deserted her, began to giggle.

"What in the world's funny now?" I demanded, daring at last to spare the breath.

"I was just thinking about that man Riley," she answered. "He must have been a tough one!"

Tough he must have been, but right now I was wondering about his longevity. Did he live to a ripe old age on this kind of diet?

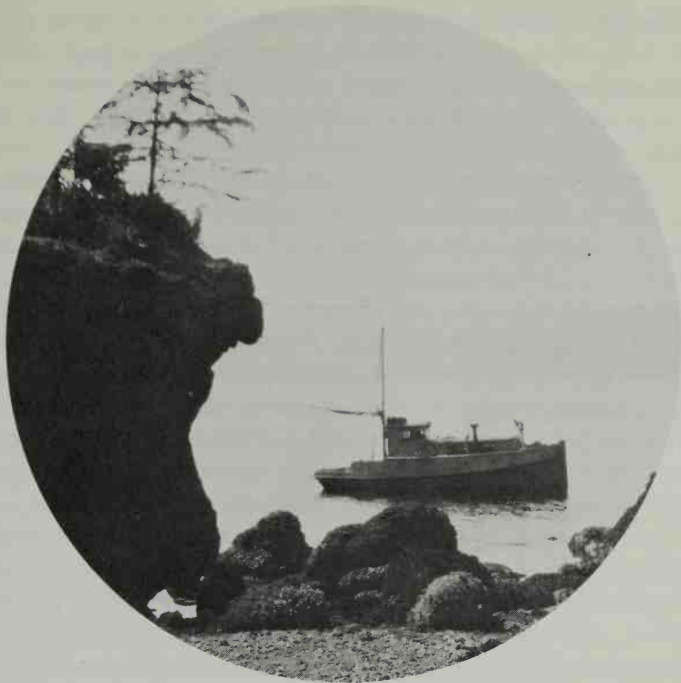
The stern was high enough now that the water was coming in more slowly. Ruth went in and dressed, then took over the bailing while I dressed. When the deck was higher than the surface we had only to pump the boat dry, then wait for the tide to float us. Finally, when we were riding on an even keel, I took the pike pole and shoved the boat off the stump. We were afloat!

Later, snugged down in an anchorage I knew was safe, I took a flashlight and called Ruth, "Come out on deck, I want to show you something."

I pointed the light to the deck, the hatch combing and the rail, all sheathed in glare ice. The water we'd splashed while we were bailing had frozen wherever it hit the boat.

And out there, barelegged and barefooted, Ruth had thought it was a warm night!





## Chapter 8

We trapped in Handlogger Cove during the winter of 1931-'32 and, as always in those days, went to town for the holidays. Ruth's folks now lived in town, the boys came in from their trapping ground, and the family gathering in midwinter broke the monotony of isolation in the wilderness.

Heading back to our cove for the last half of the trapping season, we were in a happy mood. Things had gone well in town—Christmas with the family, a New Year's party with friends, a better price for our furs than we'd expected—and now a smooth day for traveling, a rarity in January. The temperature was mild and the midwinter sun, though low in the sky, was bright. As we rounded Point Alava we looked out across sparkling blue water, calm and lovely as on a fine June morning.

Those tiny islands to the south actually were mountains, all but their peaks hidden below the horizon, and that wide gap between the islands was the broad Pacific, wide open clear to Honolulu. All the big storms came howling in from the Pacific, and then Point Alava, with its shoal water and strong tidal currents, was a treacherous place for small boats. Many times, even in summer, it held us stormbound for days, and when the winter gales came raging in, it was as nasty a piece of water as you could find anywhere.

As we approached our home cove we chuckled to see our string of laundry waving in the breeze. Whenever we expected to be gone for several days, Ruth would put up a clothesline beside the deserted cabin on the beach and hang out a string of our old clothes to discourage intrusion. How effective this ruse was, we didn't know, but when we used it we never did come back and find anyone trying to usurp our trapping ground.

Next morning was bright, clear and frosty. While Ruth worked the line along the beach I took my snowshoes and a load of traps and went inland, looking for beaver. The snow, though knee-deep in there, was packed and crusted, good for traveling.

I found fresh beaver cuttings scattered along the banks of a small stream, so I started upstream to find where the beaver were working. The stream came through a narrow, rocky canyon lined with big trees. A recent freshet had washed off the snow along the banks, so I had easy going with my snowshoes strapped to my back.

Finding more and more beaver sticks, I followed the stream a long way farther than I'd expected to go. At last, leaving the walls of the canyon behind, I came out onto flat country and found a string of small lakes from which the creek emerged. That's where the beaver were working. Taking advantage of the recent mild weather, they'd been industriously gathering a supply of fresh food. The indications were good. I figured I could get my legal limit right there.

When I finished setting my last trap I noticed that the sky was obscured by heavy, dark clouds and it was later than I'd supposed. I would have to hurry to get home before dark. In fact, beneath the heavy timber of the canyon it would be dark by four o'clock, and trying to hurry over the wet, slippery rocks along the creek would be dangerous. I strapped my snowshoes on and

struck out across the open tundra, among thinly scattered jack pines.

The clouds had brought a rise in temperature, turning the snow soft and sticky. I found hard, slow traveling, and although I still didn't realize how far inland I had come, I soon knew I couldn't possibly get out of the woods before dark.

Ruth was not yet reconciled to my wandering in the woods after dark, so I hurried on, knowing she would be anxious. Darkness settled down while I was still far back in the hills, but I've always had good night vision, so I wasn't delayed much except when I had to cross deep ravines. It seemed I was becoming unaccountably tired, though, and my head was aching. It began to rain. The wind grew stronger. When I stopped to rest I would become chilled, and I'd have to drive myself to move on.

My headache got worse. My legs began to ache, and my back. True, I'd had a long, hard day with no lunch, but I shouldn't be in such poor condition after such a short time in town.

Hour after hour I plodded on. The wet, soggy snow clung to my snowshoes, making them heavy as lead. My pace got slower and my rest stops more frequent.

While I was still far back in the woods I was startled to hear a rifle shot from the direction of our cove. It always gives me a feeling of apprehension to hear a gunshot at night. What was going on down there? No one could see to shoot anything. I held my breath and counted off the seconds: eight, nine, ten, boom! Ruth was firing signal shots. Was she thinking to direct me out of the woods? It would seem pitch black to her, coming out of the lighted cabin. Or was she in trouble? I had no gun, and my answering shouts were carried away on the wind.

All my route now lay through the woods, where it was darker and where the soft, deep snow was laced with underbrush and fallen timber. I was stumbling and falling often, and finding it increasingly difficult to get up. Worried about Ruth, I wanted to run, but I could hardly put one leaden foot ahead of the other. I had to stop often and lean against a tree to catch my breath and rest my shaking legs. But I was soaked to the skin from the driving rain and from sprawling in the wet snow. I'd get chilled and force myself to move on, still gasping for breath.

At long last, after five hours of floundering travel, I came out onto the beach of our home cove and called to Ruth. She came in

an instant. Unable to stand the suspense any longer, she was out in the skiff with the rifle, lantern and a thermos bottle of hot coffee, setting out to trail me through the timber. We told each other how fortunate it was that I'd arrived just in time to stop her, as she'd have followed my trail to the creek and gone upstream while I was plodding home through the timber. How disastrous this could have been, we didn't realize until later.

Back aboard the boat, with me in dry clothes, thawing out, we considered the incident closed. I told Ruth about the beaver at the lakes, and assured her that our season's catch was almost as good as made. What if I was tired? That was part of the trapping game.

But when I couldn't eat supper, we knew something more than weariness ailed me. Next morning it was obvious that I had a severe case of flu. As if that weren't bad enough, a howling southeast storm was raging and we didn't have the slightest chance of getting to town.

For three days I lay in bed, too sick to know or care what was going on. This was of course before the days of radiophones and airplanes, as well as the miracle drugs. Flu was often fatal, as Ruth well knew. It had taken one of her brothers. But she was a good nurse and I had full confidence in her ability to take care of me.

Then she began to feel symptoms of flu.

We knew it might be months before anyone happened along. We were entirely self-dependent, and I, delirious part of the time, was too sick to care for myself. If Ruth should take ill . . .

"I'm taking you to town," she announced.

Later I was to wish I had talked her out of it, but I made no protest. She was a good navigator, with years of boating experience, and she knew the waters. It was up to her.

The wind had moderated. Ruth didn't wait to see whether the storm was over, as the trip to town took six hours, and only from nine o'clock in the morning to four in the afternoon was it light enough for travel. She made everything shipshape, started the engine, and pulled the anchor. We were on our way. I did put on my clothes, in case of emergency, but I was so dizzy I lay down again, trusting Ruth to judge whether we should keep going or turn back to the shelter of our cove.

After a while I began to feel the heave of the ground swell. We were nearing Point Alava, and that stretch of water Ruth most

feared — wide open to all the storms and with a lee shore. Miles of jagged rocks that would scare you to look at them, not a vestige of an opening where one could find shelter. The storm must have passed, I thought, or Ruth would never have ventured so far.

But the pitching of the boat got worse. Braced to keep from being thrown out of bed, I lay with every nerve tense to the pitch and roll of the boat, ears tuned to the throb of the engine, straining for any variation that would warn of trouble. But those shuddering crashes were the impacts of the oncoming seas, the racing of the motor came as we slid down into the trough, and the heavy lugging denoted our climbing up the steep slope of the next oncoming swell.

On and on we went. I tried to judge how far out into the open water we were getting, as I knew Ruth was fighting determinedly for more sea room between us and that wicked shore. From where I lay I could see her, braced in the wheelhouse, steadfastly fighting the wheel as the storm threw the boat about. I started up to help her. My head spun, my legs wobbled, and a sudden lurch threw me violently back across the bed.

At last there came a couple of smaller swells. Ruth spun the wheel rapidly and held it hard over to starboard. She was bringing the boat around to run before the sea and quarter back around the point. I drew a big sigh of relief, sure we'd make it now. Running before the sea would be easier on the boat, and our time would be better. Ruth would have it easier at the wheel, too.

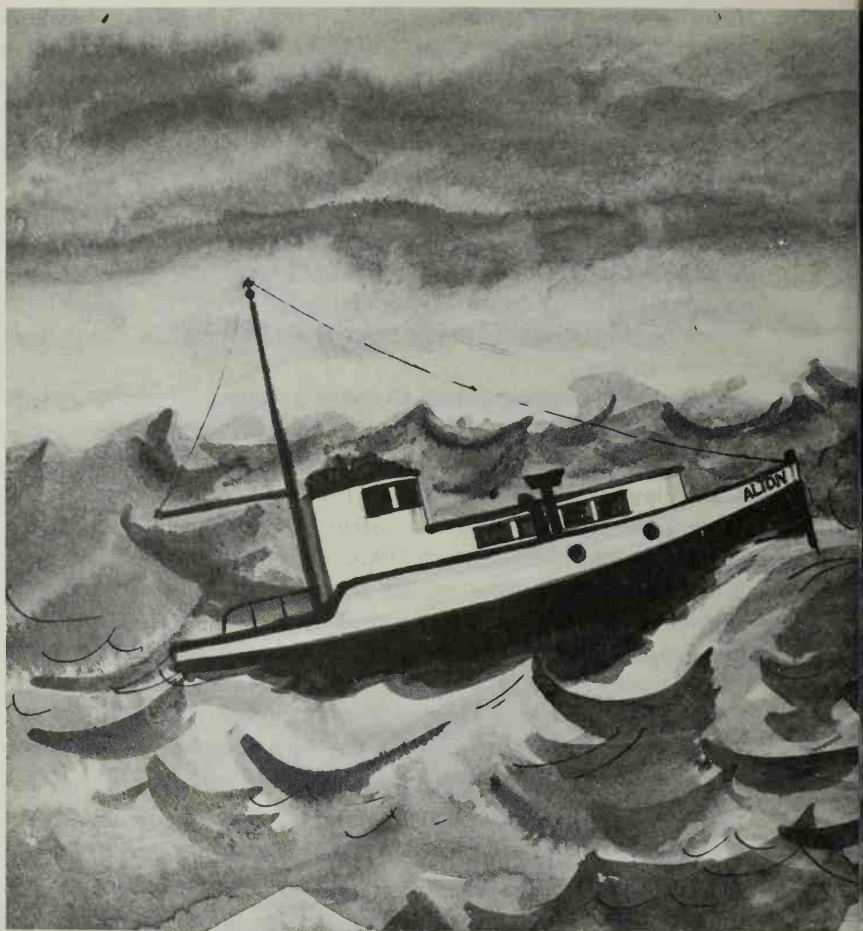
The motion of the boat was slower now, but I wondered, as we sloughed down into the hollows, whether she'd ever right herself again. The engine was beating its steady rhythm. I lay back and tried to relax.

"You'll have to come up and take the wheel," Ruth called down. "We're taking water, I'll have to pump."

Amazed at how quickly that announcement brought strength back to my legs, I scrambled out of bed and hurried up to take the wheel.

Great Heaven! We were miles from shore! A howling southeast gale was whipping the sea to a mass of white in every direction. Mountainous waves were racing past us with curling, feathery white crests, and the rocky shore at the point was a seething mass of white foam and spray. How had Ruth ever found the courage to come out into this?





I had no time to ponder. Navigating took all my attention, and all my energy. As the curling crests lifted the stern of the boat high into the air, I had to keep her headed straight before them. If she ever got broadside, she'd roll over and swamp. And if I kept on that course, I'd be heading straight into the rock headlands of the point. I had to gain every possible inch to port if we were to clear the point. After each comber I brought her to port as far as I dared, then wheeled back straight before the next comber,



gaining a few feet at a time. But the wind and the waves were driving us relentlessly toward the deadly rocks.

"You'd better see what you can do," Ruth said from the doorway. "I can't get the deck pump to work."

Out on deck was a fine place for a man with flu! But this was a fight for survival, not mere recovery. I threw on my coat and hat and went out. On deck, where I caught the full force of the gale, I

had to hold onto something to keep from being blown or washed overboard. The air was full of blowing spume, and the big combers, coming up astern, washed over the deck. Each comber lifted our skiff, which was pulled up and tied to the mast, and set it down in a different place. Worse, each one poured water through the opening for the tiller, and the boat was gradually filling.

With the wind slapping spume and rain at me in torrents and the seas washing my legs halfway to the knees, I worked frantically at the pump. Normally I'd have had it working in two minutes, but now I couldn't get a drop of water through it. My brain refused to work. I couldn't think what to do.

"Take the wheel," Ruth called. "I'll bail."

By this time the flywheel was throwing spray all over the engine room. It hit the hot engine and exhaust pipe, and made so much steam I couldn't see into the engine room. Ruth got a deck bucket and started bailing. With her head down in the bilge, she soon became seasick. She would dip, heave into the bucket, throw the contents of the bucket overboard. Dip, heave, throw; dip, heave, throw. But she didn't slow down, she worked fast and steadily while I fought the wheel.

Ahead was the last headland of the point and beyond it, the shelter of Lucky Cove. But the wind and the seas were forcing us dangerously close to the black fangs of rock I could see through the seething foam. If we hit, we wouldn't last five minutes.

Braced in the pilothouse, I fought for every inch of clearance I could get, while Ruth, in the thickening steam of the engine room, fought just as desperately against the rising water that sloshed around her feet. Thank goodness for that old heavy-duty engine, with the make-and-break ignition and no spark plugs to short out. It kept running with never a miss.

We were gaining on the point, but oh, how slowly! The boat, with her load of water, was responding more and more sluggishly to the wheel, rolling farther, righting herself less easily. If we did clear the point, it would be by luck and a mighty slim margin.

Suddenly I smelled fresh gas fumes. Nothing, not even a storm-dashed reef a mere boat-length away, is more alarming to an old gas-boater. Leaking gasoline causes more disasters on power boats than anything else. Shouting to Ruth to watch the wheel, I dashed down and found that her bailing bucket had hit a

drain cock in the gas line, knocking it wide open. A full stream of gasoline was running into the bilge and the flywheel was throwing it over the hot engine. I shut off the flow of gasoline and, though the boat was so full of gas fumes we could hardly breathe, we kept going. We had no alternative. The water was rising steadily.

At last we were abreast of the headland. Back of it I could see the calm water of the anchorage. I rolled the wheel hard over. As the boat swung broadside to the sea, a last giant comber caught her and rolled her on her beam ends. Braced though I was, I was thrown against the wall, and Ruth had to drop her bailing can and hold on with both hands.

Then the engine died. But the momentum of the waterlogged boat carried us to the comparative calm of the anchorage, where we could drop the hook. Lucky Cove was appropriately named, but no one ever was luckier to gain its safety than we were that day.

With no waves washing in, and the pump repaired, Ruth pumped the boat dry, but it was up to me to get the engine running again. By the time we were shipshape and ready to travel, it was dark, and besides, Ruth had had all the boating she wanted for one day.

How had she dared start around Point Alava in such a storm? She hadn't, she said. There was only the big ground swell from the previous storm when she'd started, and she was too far out to turn back when the new gale struck. Such are the hazards of winter travel by small boat in Southeastern Alaska.

Ruth's seasickness was gone as soon as we reached calm water. So were her flu symptoms. She always has believed the gas fumes drove the flu out of her system, but she isn't sure the treatment was preferable to the disease.

Minutes after we were tied up in Ketchikan the next morning, Ruth had Dr. J.B. Beeson down looking me over. He found I had a temperature of 104 degrees, and said I must go to the hospital immediately.

"I can't go," I said. "Hospitals cost money, and we don't have it."

"Well," he replied after some thought, "I know how that is nowadays, and I know your wife is a good nurse. You stay here for a while at least, and I'll come down to see how you're getting on."

And that he did. With the floats and the boats sheeted in ice and snow, he came down every day for eight days. Finally he said to Ruth, "I think we did a good job, to pull him through that one."

We always had a soft spot in our hearts for old silver-haired Dr. Beeson.

One evening when I was almost well again, Ruth announced, "You look awful. You'll have to shave."

My frosty beard was not becoming, and beards were not "in" at the time, but my hands were still too shaky for such a delicate operation as shaving. As I pointed out, all Ruth's expert nursing would go to waste if I cut my throat trying to shave.

"Then I'll shave you," she said.

Our bed was an extension couch with the table at its head. When we pulled out the bed we removed the leg from under the front end of the table, and held it up with a cord from the ceiling.

Ruth, needing better light for her barbering, moved the kerosene lamp and inadvertently placed it under the cord, which soon burned in two. Down came the end of the table, striking me a stunning blow on the head and pitching the lamp to the floor. The lamp chimney broke and the lamp, still alight, went rolling across the floor, while the sugar bowl poured its contents into my hair and beard and down my neck.

When we found that no real damage had occurred, except to the lamp chimney, I grumbled a little about the kind of shaving powder Ruth tried to use on me. I'd have been safer, after all, to risk my own hands on the razor.

The trapping season was closed long before I was able to shuffle unsteadily up to the game warden's office to report that I still had traps out, but would pick them up as soon as I had the strength. And the winter gales were long past when we rounded Point Alava again, on calm seas, to gather up those traps and throw out the spoiled fur that was to have filled out our winter's catch.





## Chapter 9

Ernie, my youngest brother, loved to hunt, so the letters I wrote about hunting in Alaska eventually lured him up to join me.

It was late October. Ruth's father was ill and she was staying with the old folks, helping to care for him. Ernie and I were staying aboard the *Alton*, moored at Ketchikan's City Float.

One evening we were sitting at the galley table talking about hunting, when a sudden roll to the boat announced that someone heavy had stepped aboard. The door opened and a pair of massive shoulders twisted through it, accompanied by a big, booming laugh. It was our old friend, Harold.

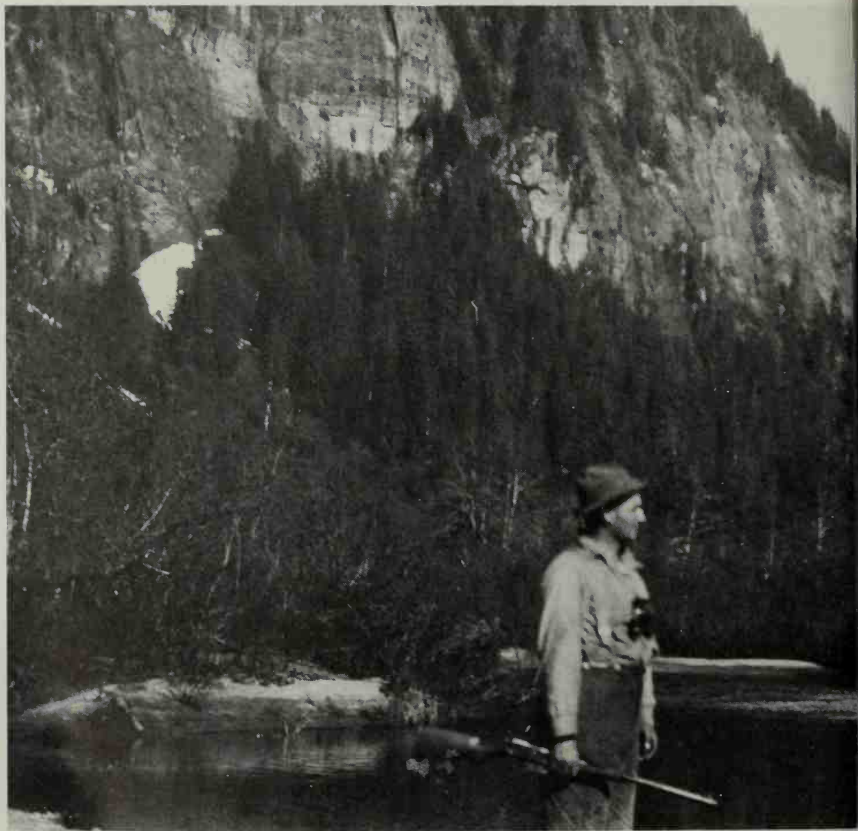
"When are you going to take me out to get that goat?" he asked.

Ever since I'd taken Harold on his first bear hunt, up in Walker Cove, he'd been wanting to go back in the fall for a goat.

Walker Cove would suit Ernie and me just fine, and we'd been having a stretch of good fall weather, so the time was right.

"How about tomorrow?" I said.

Harold came down early. We got our supplies aboard, gassed up, and headed down Tongass Narrows toward the south entrance to Behm Canal. It was a crisp, frosty morning. Point Alava was smooth as a millpond, and at sight of the mainland mountains I was well pleased to note their mantle of fresh snow, which came well below timberline. The goats would be down off



the peaks, feeding on the slides beneath the cliffs—a great advantage to the hunter in the short days of late fall.

Up in the fjord, the mountains were blanketed with the solid white of new snow to the 2,000-foot level. Lower down, where the ground was free of snow, the goats were feeding. We cruised along slowly, glassing the slide paths and seeing goats, singly, in pairs, in small flocks. By evening we had counted thirty-four. But in that rugged country, out of every five goats you'll see, four will be absolutely inaccessible. You might get near enough to kill one of the four, but you couldn't get to it and get it out.



In this rugged country only one out of five goats is accessible.

Next day, cruising down the fjord, we saw a goat lying down in a small meadow. With good going we could have climbed up to it in twenty minutes, but directly below it was a wide patch of steep, smooth rock ending in a vertical cliff 200 feet high. To the right were sheer cliffs; to the left, a steep slide reaching down to the water.

Ernie put Harold and me ashore at the foot of the slide and we started to climb, using the loose granite boulders as stepping stones. We found that an extension of the cliff below the goat projected through the timber to the slide, so we had to get above that. Then we found our way into the timber blocked by a smooth rock wall at the edge of the slide. It wasn't high, only ten to twenty feet, but with nothing to hold onto, we were stopped cold. In all that expanse between the water's edge and the top of the mountain, we found there was only one place where we could get from the slide to the timber. By working our way onto a projection of loose rock we could reach a bush at the top, and using it for leverage we could pull ourselves over.

I made it easily and Harold followed, but he loosened the only toe hold on the face of the wall. As I helped him up over the brink we watched the rocks go tumbling down the slide.

Well, we couldn't go back that way, but we wouldn't worry about it now. On the other side of that strip of timber was a goat, less than 200 yards from us and at the same level. I led the way through the timber until I could see it, still lying in the little meadow where we'd seen it earlier.

Harold slid up in front, with a knee rest took careful aim, and fired. It was a nice billy with horns of eight and a half inches, and it probably weighed 250 pounds. Harold couldn't have been happier if he'd bagged the world's record goat. He danced and whooped so you'd have heard him for miles. He wanted to show it to Ernie just as it was, but after I explained the custom of leaving a donation for the ravens, he consented to let me field dress it.

Like all goats in that rugged terrain, this one was too heavy to be packed out in one piece, and Harold was not about to see it dismembered, so we dragged it down across the meadow grass to the bare rock below. The polished granite, steep as the roof of a house and wet with melting snow, sloped 100 feet from the last sod and ended in an abrupt drop into deep water 200 feet below. I worked the goat down onto the smooth slope and

gave it a boost. Ernie was resting on the oars out in the bay. A moment later I saw him rowing hurriedly toward shore, then lost sight of him under the cliff. The goat's heavy coat would keep it from sinking until Ernie got it.

Now that Harold had his goat, it was up to me to get him off the mountain. He had ruined the only place where we could have climbed down, for there at the slide, where the cliff was its lowest, ten feet was too far to drop when you'd land on loose granite boulders piled up at an angle of forty-five degrees.

I led the way down along the brink of the cliff as it cut through the timber, and soon found what I was looking for. A tall hemlock, growing at the foot of the cliff, reached above the brink and some of its branches were just a couple of feet beyond our reach. That was close enough. Standing at the very brink, I let myself fall forward, grasped one of the stout branches, then swung my feet over into the tree. It was such a common way of getting down when I found myself "bluffed" that I supposed anyone could do it.

Harold handed me the rifles, stood on the brink sizing up the branch he would grasp, then looked at the ground sixty feet below and backed out. "I can't do it," he said.

"It's the only way to get down," I told him. "There's nothing to it. Just keep your eyes on the limb and you can't miss it."

He came and tried it again. Again he looked down and shrank back, then went back up the hill and sat down. I coaxed, argued and pleaded. He got up and started down.

"Keep your eyes on that limb," I instructed. "Don't look down."

But he did look down, before he got near the brink. Again he turned back, sat down, and hung onto a bush. "I can't do it," he moaned. "I just can't do it."

I never saw a fellow so deflated. I really felt sorry for him, but when I thought of some of the really dangerous spots where little Ruth had followed me without a whimper, I was disgusted too. I cussed him out and called him names until I was ashamed of myself. Still he hung onto the bush. I'd have to think of something else.

I couldn't get back to him. Besides, I'd worked up a sweat climbing the hill, and now I was getting chilled. I wanted to get moving. If I had a rope, I could climb the slide and toss it to him at the low part of the cliff, and he could lower himself down. I called



to Ernie, but the noise from the waterfalls drowned out my voice. I'd have to go down to the boat and get a rope. But first I fired a parting shot at Harold.

"All right," I told him with finality. "I'm not going to roost up here all night. I'm going down. You can come, or you can stay there, and if you stay I'll come back in two or three days and shoot you so you won't starve to death." And I started down the tree.

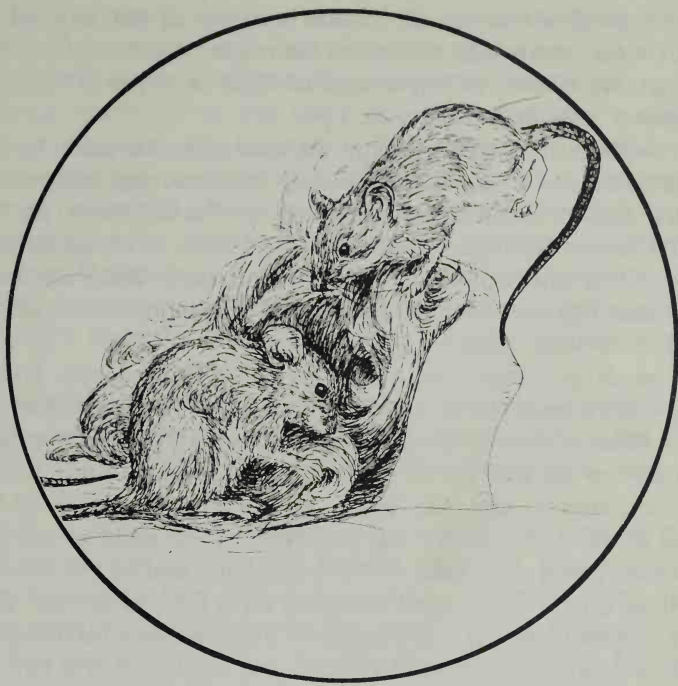
That brought Harold out of it. He came down and swung into the tree as easily as I had, then we climbed to the lowest branches and slid to the ground. Ernie, with the goat in the skiff, came for us when we got to the beach. He said the goat had hit the water twenty feet out from the base of the cliff.

Harold refused to have his goat butchered. He wanted to show it to his friends, and show it he did. He went about town day after day, jubilantly announcing his triumph and coaxing everyone to come and see the fine goat he had hanging on his back porch. When at last he could find no more admirers for his prize, he skinned it. But alas, after the dunking in salt water and all those days of hanging in mild weather, every bit of the meat was sour.

\* \* \*

Ruth and I didn't go trapping that fall. Her father, though only seventy-two, was losing his fight for life, and we didn't want to be off in the wilderness when we might be needed in town. He loved his family, and enjoyed home festivities so much that we went ahead with plans for a Christmas celebration, all feeling it would very likely be his last.

The day before Christmas he worsened. We called off our Christmas Eve celebration and Ruth stayed out to sit up with him. At the first streak of dawn she came home, and I didn't have to ask. Daddy Johnstone was dead.



## Chapter 10

Early in the 1930's, before the depression showed signs of ending, gold fever swept the country. Ruth and I were more susceptible than most people. It was the lure of gold that had started my northward trek in 1907, and Ruth's earliest memories included prospecting. Following in her daddy's footsteps, she had roamed the hills of Montana searching for gold-bearing rock, which her father took to town and exchanged for candy. At least, he always started out with the rocks and always returned with the candy.

We knew of an abandoned mining claim on the beach at Indian Point, once worked by a prospector known as Billy the Brick. What his real name was, and how much gold he found there, I never learned, but we had panned the beach gravel and found

some gold Billy overlooked. It was nothing to get worked up about when there was money to be made in other ways, but enough, we hoped, to buy a sack of flour or a pair of overalls without a hole in the seat.

We made our plans accordingly. To have adequate water for the sluice boxes, we'd have to go out while the snow was still melting on the mountains, and as there was no harbor there for the launch, we would have to camp on the beach. It would be cold sleeping in a tent so early in the season, but not so bad if we had a good bear hide to cover our spring mattress, and I knew a likely place to look for one.

As much as a bear hide, I wanted to try out the new Enfield army rifle I'd acquired through the National Rifle Association. I'd had it fitted with new hunting sights, targeted it in with service ammunition (which didn't cost so much), and found that it worked perfectly and was highly accurate.

Out at the bear pasture, we anchored at the head of the bay where we had a wide view of the grass flats, and as the evening shadows crept in we began watching for a bear to appear. Just after sundown we saw one feeding on the grass beyond the wide, shallow creek which flowed through the middle of the flat. By keeping behind a point of timber that reached into the flat, I could approach without being seen. I took my Enfield and rowed ashore.

Reaching the point of timber, I saw the bear still feeding in the same place, a nice, big black. He was much farther away than I'd judged, but by going up a small slough that wound through the flat, I could get within good shooting range.

I crouched low and moved up through the slough, and at the bend that brought me closest to the bear I raised up for a look. He was there, looking much bigger than he had from a distance. I was glad he was a black rather than a grizzly, as I was a long way from the nearest tree. Oh, I wasn't worried. I had perfect confidence in my new gun, and I'd filled it with 220-grain bullets, supposed to be the proper medicine for big bears. When he turned broadside I aimed for the shoulder and fired.

Instead of going down, the bear whirled and came charging straight at me. I'd never had a black bear charge me, yet here was this one, coming fast. I worked the bolt for another shot. It jammed tight. I tried to loosen the cartridge with my fingers. I

couldn't budge it. I stole a hurried glance at the bear. He had splashed across the creek and was climbing the bank on my side.

Dropping down, I hugged the muddy bank of the slough and worked frantically at the balky gun. The cartridge would go neither forward nor backward. Then the bear rushed past, jumping across my ditch less than ten feet from me, and kept on going. He wasn't charging, after all; he was heading for the protection of the forest! I drew a big sigh of relief and, when my hands quit shaking, worked the cartridge loose with my knife.

That gun was made for the sharp-pointed service ammunition. It wouldn't feed the wide-shouldered 220-grain bullets into the barrel.

Chambering a bullet from my pocket, I went looking for my bear. He lay at the edge of the woods, stone dead—a fine, large male just out of hibernation, with a thick, heavy coat. Just what we wanted.

Ruth, watching from the deck of the launch, had seen me go up the slough and out of sight behind the point, then turned her attention to the bear. She'd expected to hear more shots as the bear went charging across the flat, straight for the place she knew I'd be, and when none came she knew something had gone wrong. She was sure the bear was charging to attack me, but what was I doing? She strained for some sound that would give her a clue. There was none. She'd have taken the other heavy rifle and come to my rescue, except I had the only skiff. All she could do was watch, listen and wait, so she was greatly relieved when she saw me coming with the bear pelt draped over my shoulder.

When the hide was dry we proceeded to set up our gold camp. We beachcombed lumber for floor and walls and pitched our tent under a big cedar tree, just back of a clean sand beach. With table and shelves and a bed frame for the spring mattress, we had a cozy camp. We had no stove, so Ruth cooked on a driftwood fire in front of the tent. With the launch anchored securely in a safe harbor four miles away, and the skiff pulled up above the high tide line, I set up my sluice boxes and started mining.

While I shoveled the gravel into the sluice boxes, Ruth climbed the hill and hunted hooters, or panned for nuggets in the creek. She was panning when she found the largest nugget we took off that claim, and she kept it, set in a pin, as a memento of our gold-mining days.

Someone would have to go often to look after the launch. Occasionally we'd make a day of it, going to one of our favorite trout streams too, but usually Ruth went alone while I kept shoveling gravel.

Once when we were in town, a friend felt sorry for Ruth because she had to row four miles to the launch and four miles back, so he offered us a bargain in an outboard motor. If we could use it, we could have it for five dollars. That seemed like a good proposition, so we took it on trial.

It must have been the first outboard Ole Evinrude ever built. It was a heavy monstrosity of cast iron and brass, and the most cantankerous contraption one man ever offered to another. We called it Old Misery. It would purr along for a little way, then for no apparent reason, stop. Although it had a spark that would knock you end-over-end and kick you while you were down, no amount of persuasion would get it going again. We never made a trip with that thing that it didn't hitch a free ride most of the way.

Beside our camp was a pool in the creek, and there Ruth set up a plank where she could work on the recalcitrant motor. She would crank it until her arms ached, then rub liniment on her sore muscles and go back and crank some more. On our next trip to town we returned Old Misery to its owner with thanks, and gladly went back to rowing.

As the summer advanced, Ruth picked buckets of big, luscious golden salmonberries, and on warm days she would swim in the channel. One day she swam straight out, turned to look back, and saw a huge sea lion surface between her and the shore. After that she did her swimming close to the beach.

Later a salmon trap was installed close by, and the watchman let us have all the fish we wanted to eat. We would row out to the trap, select a salmon in the spiller, and snare it with a wire noose. Ruth would place the salmon, cleaned and split, skin down on an oak plank and prop it over the coals with one of my gravel screens to hold it in place. Just before the fish was done she'd give it a light smoke by throwing green alder twigs onto the fire, then she'd serve it with potatoes roasted in the hot sand beneath the coals. I've never eaten fish that tasted so good—though maybe eight or nine hours a day of shoveling gravel had something to do with it.



Our camp faced the west. The sunsets were indescribably beautiful as the sun sank behind the snow-capped peaks of the mountains across the channel.

One morning when the water was glassy smooth, I saw three tiny specks far out in the channel. With the glasses I could see they were swimming, and as they came closer I saw they were deer. They came in and waded ashore below the tent. Here was meat right at our door, but when we looked at the seven-mile stretch of water they had swum across, we felt the deer deserved the sanctuary of our beach. It was a full half hour before they had rested enough to leave the edge of the water.

Occasionally a boat went by, usually too far out for even a friendly wave of hands, but we did have a lot of company. On our first night in the tent a mouse got into our grocery box. I didn't like mice messing up my food. Store grub was too hard to get.

That evening I whittled out a little figure four and made a deadfall trap of one of the grocery boxes. Before we got to sleep there came a thump as the box dropped, and I dozed off well satisfied with the way my "trapline" was working. Next morning I lifted the box and found a very flat, very dead mouse, so thought the problem was solved—until Ruth, starting breakfast, announced that mice had been in our groceries again.

That night when I heard the box drop, I got up and reset it. Just as I was snuggled back into bed it dropped again. I reset it again. Came a third thump, but I was tired. Three tonight, one last night—two pairs—no doubt the entire mouse population of our camp area, I decided as I went to sleep.

Again, as Ruth started to get breakfast, she found that mice had been into our store grub. I made a second trap, but it seemed the more mice I caught, the thicker they came. We took a day to beachcomb boards and make mouseproof grub boxes.

This only caused the mice to seek another source of food, which they found soon enough—the grease on the under side of our bear skin. When they gnawed on that in the stillness of the night, you'd have thought the bear himself was coming up through the floorboards to repossess his skin. When we would startle them, they'd come scampering across the top of the bed, and Ruth never did get adjusted to the feel of tiny mouse feet on her forehead and tails dragged across her face during the night.

The worst, though, was when they'd start pawing around, making nests in our hair. I don't know anything that will break into a sound sleep faster, and bring you up pawing the air, than having a mouse start wadding up a bunch of hair on the top of your head.

They were the long-tailed wood mice common in the forests of Alaska, cute little fellows if you haven't had too much experience with them. I've had scores of them pawing around my hair while I was bedded down under a spruce tree, and I never did know what they were trying to do. I never stayed still long enough to find out.

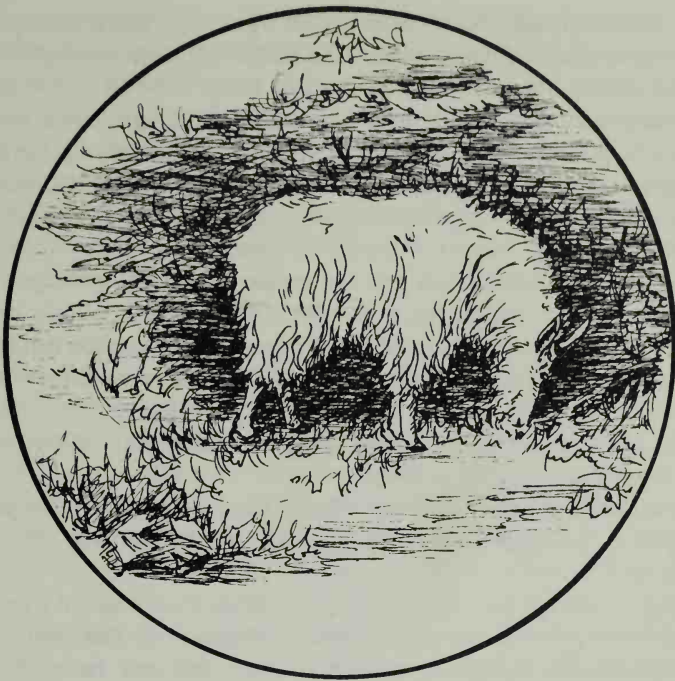
You can't spend the night resetting mousetraps and fighting mice out of your face and hair, then spend the day shoveling gravel. On the other hand, you can't admit defeat by a mere mouse. Not when it's your grub money at stake. We were at wit's end.

Then a keg floated onto our beach. I fitted it with a delicately balanced tin lid which I smeared liberally with bacon grease, and poured in a few inches of water.

We had to go to town that day. When we returned a few days later, I fished thirty-some mice out of the keg. It kept the little demons under control and gave us a chance to sleep.

We didn't get rich on Billy the Brick's claim, but it did produce enough to support the operation and us, and we enjoyed our mining. Whenever I shut off the water in the sluice boxes, Ruth was right there, digging in the riffles, looking for nuggets. If she found some, she would get out the Sears catalog to see what she could buy. It was fun, too, when I cleaned up the boxes and panned down the concentrates, to see how much gold we had to put into our bottles.

Ketchikan was largely a mining town in the early days, with several gold mines operating in the vicinity. We were much surprised, therefore, when we took our first bottle of gold to town, to find that not one place of business would buy it. No one knew anything about buying gold, and I guess no one wanted to know. We had to send ours to the United States Assay Office in Seattle.



## Chapter 11

By late summer there was no longer enough water in the creek for my sluice box at Indian Point. Interest had revived in the old gold-mining district in Helm Bay, so we went over there. Ruth's brother, Bruce, went with us and we climbed the hills and panned the creeks, searching for a mine of our own.

After several days of prospecting on Boulder Creek we found a place that looked good to us—nice little nuggets that plinked cheerfully when we dropped them onto the bottom of the gold pan. We were yet to discover that the old-timers hadn't passed up a thing worthwhile.

Next morning, after our breakfast of sourdough hot cakes aboard the *Alton*, Bruce and I went up the creek to put in another

day. Although we didn't have much variety in store grub, and hunting season had been open for a week, we were so engrossed in our search for gold that we hadn't taken time to get a deer.

I had been panning for an hour without finding a color worth putting into the bottle, while Bruce, down in the trench he was digging, was wrestling with a two-man boulder. He threw his tools aside in disgust and came over, mopping his face. "What we need," he said, "is some good red meat."

I threw the concentrates into the creek, tossed the gold pan up under a spruce, stood up, and said, "Let's go."

"Where are you going to hunt?" Ruth asked when we returned to the boat for our guns. She wanted always to know which way we were going, in case she had to go look for us.

"Straight up to the top of Old Baldy," I answered. "We're sure to find a deer around timberline."

"I sure hope you get one," Ruth said, looking at the bare shelves in the cupboard. "It's getting awfully hard to make a meal."

We crossed the narrow strip of lowland and went up Old Baldy, whose rocky crown dominated the whole country. We were glad for the brush, something to hang onto, for the face of the mountain was just about as nearly perpendicular as it could be and still grow anything. It was the shortest way to the top, though, and an easy route down which to bring a deer.

Up at timberline the mountain was girdled by a series of small, rounded, open-topped knolls, their sides clothed with thick, low clumps of mountain hemlock, moist swales carpeted with deer lilies separating the knolls. Deer tracks were numerous and the deer lilies were freshly cropped.

Bruce and I sat down on top of the first knoll to take a blow after the hard climb. Below us was the Gold Standard Mine, a steady thump-thump-thump coming from its stamp mill, and a short distance from it, in a cove too close in under the brow of the mountain to be seen from our vantage, the *Alton* was anchored. Helm Bay reached out to join Behm Canal, and across it were the mountains of Revilla Island, with the city of Ketchikan hidden on their far side.

After a brief rest we separated, Bruce going to the left along the rim above Boulder Creek and I to the right, toward the edge where Old Baldy broke off abruptly in a sheer cliff on the Gold Standard

Creek side. Hunting slowly and quietly among the knolls and swales, I worked gradually upward. Although deer tracks were plentiful, I saw nothing.

I reached the last knoll, where I found only a few scattered clumps of stunted hemlock not more than shoulder high. Only one swale separated me from the bare rock peak of Old Baldy, where nothing grew except grass and moss and lichens. I would look into the swale, then turn back.

Quietly I climbed the grassy slope. When I could look across its top I saw a small clump of hemlock not thirty yards away, and sticking out of the clump about midway was the rear of a small mountain goat. I could hardly believe my eyes, as I hadn't known there were goats on Old Baldy.

He was a little fellow—a three-year-old, I thought—and we all liked goat meat better than venison. But I was not going to shoot at the part I could see, no matter how badly we needed meat. I took off my hat and, holding the rifle ready, crouched so I could just peek over the brow of the knoll. The goat, browsing on something in the bushes, kept its position.

The wind was so light I couldn't tell which way the air was drifting, but the goat, with its keen sense of smell, would soon catch my scent and be gone. If I had known what I was to learn later, I'd have shot at his rear, right then. But, I ducked back, moved a few yards to the right to get a side shot, and peeked over again.

That fool goat had moved too, and again his south end was pointing straight at me. I ducked back to my first position and, sure of a side shot, raised up with the rifle at my shoulder. The goat was gone.

I stepped up where I could see all around the clump of brush. No goat. The knoll dropped down steeply on the far side. I ran over to the brow and looked down. Not a thing in sight. My view to the right was shut off by a low knoll twenty yards away. I ran to the top of it. There, 200 yards away, running across the open side hill, was the goat in full flight, heading for the cliff and almost at the brink.

My .33 Winchester was sighted for fifty yards, for brush-hunting deer. Now, allowing for the distance, I took a coarse sight and fired. The smoke kicked up from the rock where the bullet hit, high and ahead. The goat didn't swerve. I fired again. Nothing

happened. The goat was really burning the breeze now, with only three jumps to go. My next shot would be the last. I took more careful aim and squeezed the trigger.

"One shot, game; two shots, maybe game; three shots, no game," the old hunters say. This time, however, my third 200-grain slug connected. The goat crumpled, rolled down the hill and lay still. I sauntered over, thinking how surprised Bruce would be when he came home and found a nice, fat young goat hanging up.

When I got to my goat, I just stood and stared. Little he certainly was, but not because he was so young he hadn't grown up. He was so old he had withered up. He was skinny and bony, with a short, ragged coat and a face absolutely bare clear back to his eyes and ears. Half his teeth were gone. How he had survived the rigors of winter, and how he could run so fast, have always been marvels to me.

But what horns! They were bleached gray and deeply weather-cracked, but I knew goat horns and I knew I had a prize set.

Back in 1916, hunting with Louis Kemp in British Columbia, I'd killed my first big billy. Louis was a pioneer prospector and hunter from Bella Bella. Knowing nothing about goats then, but wanting to skin out the cape for mounting if the goat was a good one, I had asked Louis's opinion.

"I'll tell you, Bill," he'd said thoughtfully after studying the horns, "it will be a long time before you kill a better one."

For ten years that goat, with horns 11 3/8 inches long, headed the list as the largest billy in the *Records of North American Big Game*. Then a goat killed in the Canadian Rockies in 1926 moved it down to second place. Now, as nearly as I could estimate by spanning, I had another record.

I was still marveling when Bruce came up. "That looks like the one off the Ark!" he said in disgust.

"But look at the horns!"

"Hell, I can't eat horns," he growled. "I'm going to get a deer." He stamped off in the direction of Boulder Creek.

The cape was worthless. The hide was so tough I could hardly cut it. After a lot of sawing with my knife I got into where the meat should have been, but all I could find was a little blue gristle. I took a ham and, carrying the head very carefully, started for home.



At the boat I got the tape and made some very careful measurements. The horns were an even twelve inches. For the second time I had killed a world's record billy, but Louis Kemp had been right—it had taken me seventeen years.

Ruth looked at the meat and turned up her nose. "Let it hang for a few days," she said.

Next day Bill Robinson, who was prospecting nearby, came over to visit. He was out of grub, so Ruth gave him the goat ham. Later he told us he had boiled it for three days but still couldn't stick a fork into it.

When the horns had dried the prescribed length of time I sent the measurements to the Boone and Crockett Club, and for sixteen years they were listed as the world's record male Rocky



Mountain goat. Then, in 1949, a goat killed by E. C. Haase in the Babine Mountains of British Columbia crowded mine down to second place.

All horns and antlers shrink as they dry, and my goat horns had been drying for twenty-two years when the Boone and Crockett Club initiated a new method of compiling trophy measurements. The club's official representative in Alaska remeasured mine and submitted their length at 11 5/8 inches: total points, 56 2/8. Haase's goat has a total of 56 6/8 points.

Shortly afterward came the sad news that my old home in California had burned to the ground and all my trophies, including my first world record goat head, were lost.

Casting about for a safe place for my second record head, I decided the proper place would be in the National Collection of Heads and Horns in the Zoological Park in New York. I received two cherished letters from the New York Zoological Society, the first expressing "the appreciative thanks of the committee responsible for the National Collection."

The second letter read, "Your goat horns are now in place on public exhibition in the Heads and Horns Museum with a 'Second Place' label below them. Needless to say, we are most grateful to you for these horns and the National Collection is enhanced greatly by their possession. Let me again thank you for these wonderful horns on behalf of the National Collection." It was signed, "John Tee-Van, General Director."

And so, the horns of an age-wizened goat that lived on Old Baldy, in distant Helm Bay, are now preserved in the National Museum where millions may see them—not because of a well-planned hunt with a renowned guide in the high haunts of the mountain goat, but because Bruce needed red meat so he could get the boulder out of our trench up on Boulder Creek.



## Chapter 12

When business began to recover we quit looking for gold and went after the money.

The price of logs went up to seven dollars a thousand, but the price of furs interested us as much, or more. Trapping filled in the long gap between seasons, when winter weather brought everything else to a halt. With a fair price for fur, and a streak of good luck on the trap line, there was always the chance—and the hope—of making more money, and making it faster and easier, than by the slow grind of logging.

In Southeast Alaska the mink catch was always the money crop. Mink were more plentiful and more easily accessible than the other fur-bearers, the price was more dependable, and in those days the season was open every year, with no limit.

Working her own trap line was one of Ruth's delights. She used to say she'd divorce me if I didn't take her mink trapping. It was not the money that interested her, it was the competition, and the thrill of anticipation as she went from trap to trap, wondering what she would find. That was more exciting than going from pool to pool on a new rainbow stream. It was like prospecting, with the chance of finding a big, shining nugget in the next pan of gravel, and, as with the prospector, it's not the gold, but the finding, that counts.

Here was a typical day on the trap line, Jackson style:

It is early in January, one of the short, dark days of midwinter, still pitch dark when the alarm wakes us at seven in the morning. Our first awareness is of the drumming of rain on the roof of the *Alton*. We listen closely: a steady rain, no wind with it, a good day on the trap line. I look out the door to make sure. It is as black as a stack of black cats. I can't even see the shore. But there are no waves coming into the cove, no sounds of wind in the trees, only the beat of the rain and the muffled roar of a hundred mountain streams. The rain is cutting the snow fast.

With the coal fire burning nicely, Ruth starts breakfast while I put on rain clothes and dip out the rowboats. When breakfast is over it is still too dark for outside activity. Under the heavy rain clouds, the gloom of night lingers.

But the gray of dawn gradually creeps through the clouds and the gulls begin to circle and cry. I put on my outdoor clothes—heavy woolens, hip boots, rain coat and rain hat—and get my rubber gloves and a pair of wool mittens. At a quarter to nine it is light enough, so I start the engine, take in the lines that moor the *Alton* to our floating logs, and we cruise out of the harbor.

Half a mile up the shore is my first trap. I cut the motor and call down to Ruth. She comes up to the pilothouse, and as soon as I hop into my skiff she throws in the clutch and opens the throttle. By the time I reach shore the boat is out of sight.

I toss the painter onto the beach. We have heavy weights on the ends of our painters, because we can't waste time tying up the skiffs in calm weather. I climb up the wet, slippery beach to my first trap, set on the mink trail just inside the woods. The trap is empty. I pull it out and hurry back to the skiff. I am taking out this part of the line. It is unproductive.

I follow along the shore, rowing from trap to trap and climbing up the beach at each one. At some points the beach is gravel, or boulders, but usually it is solid rock or bluffs. Some of the traps have been washed clean by the rain, one has a squirrel in it, a mink has sprung one. He'll never be back. Some traps need new covering, some are still in perfect working condition, but they all come out.

A mile up the shore, I come around a headland and there is the *Alton* riding at anchor in a small cove. Ruth and her skiff are gone. I climb aboard, check the fire, start the engine, then pull the anchor and head up the shore, my skiff in tow. When I overtake Ruth she holds up a mink to show me. I wigwag that I have caught nothing, and keep going.

At the next anchorage Ruth's line ends and mine begins again, so I drop the hook and take to the skiff. I am far up the shore and in the woods when I hear the motor. As the boat goes by, I step out onto the open and wave to let Ruth know I'm okay and she need not stop.

My next trap has a nice mink in it, but all the rest of the line is disappointing. A trap sprung by a fallen twig, a Steller jay caught in one, covering washed off the next, yet most are in good order, needing no attention. They simply haven't caught anything. When I get to the *Alton* again it is nearing time for lunch, so I stir up the fire and put the teakettle on. Calling the time of day as I pass Ruth, I anchor not far beyond.

I haven't gone far on my next section when I hear the *Alton's* motor. Ruth is watching. When she sees my skiff she brings the boat to a stop, and lets it drift while she gets busy in the galley. I row out and run the launch farther offshore so she won't drift onto the beach, and shut off the engine.

Ruth has two mink on deck. They were covered with mud when she got them, so she washed them in the creek. Now they are a sorry looking pair, like wet, bedraggled cats.

She has opened a can of venison soup, a byproduct of last fall's hunting, and made tea. We eat with our hip boots on. We don't waste time dressing for dinner; the days are too short.

We compare notes as we eat—where we caught our mink, the one too wise to be caught, the fresh signs we found, the deer we saw—but we don't linger long over our second cup of tea. We

hurry through lunch and get out again. It is still raining, and in this mild weather the mink will be running again tonight.

In my wet rain clothes again, I row back to the beach while Ruth takes the launch to the next anchorage. Now I am on ground that hasn't been trapped out. In my second trap is a fine big mink, and in the next one, his mate. She is a scrawny little thing, lightly caught and fighting mad. I have to hold her back with a stick to keep her from chewing holes in my boots while I release her. She scurries under the nearest log. She won't be using that trail again, so I reset the trap, hoping to catch a bigger one.

I pick up another mink, a young male, in my last trap, but my day's work isn't over. There are all those traps I picked up in the morning, and they won't catch anything lying in the skiff. I start setting them. This is new ground and I have to hunt for the runways, search for likely spots to place the traps, then camouflage them so well they'll outwit the sharp-eyed, wary mink. It is slow, exacting work. More rain runs down my neck as I stoop over the traps, and with so little exercise, I'm getting cold.

Still, I am absorbed in the task and time flies unheeded until I notice I can hardly see the ground under the trees. It is a quarter to four! I don't know how far Ruth has gone, and I may have a hard time finding her in the dark. I row hard to the launch. It is still raining and I leave a trail of water across the deck as I go below to stir up the fire. Ruth has anchored out in deep water, so there's a lot of line to pull in.

Under way, I run as close along the shore as I dare, straining my eyes, watching for Ruth. I search every foot of the shore, in every bight and indentation, but it is so dark I can't be sure and I am apprehensive lest I've passed her. Then, far ahead, I see a light blinking. She has heard me coming and is flashing her pocket flashlight. I blink the mast light in answer and steer straight toward her.

She is resting on the oars, bare-handed. She never gets cold. When I bring the boat to a stop she rows alongside, smiling broadly, and from inside her jacket where she has carried it to keep it dry, she produces a marten. With her skiff tied beside mine we head for our home cove. It is quite dark now, but I'm in familiar water, and I don't have to watch for traffic. We haven't seen another boat in a month.



When the launch is moored safely for the night, I go below to strip off my wet clothes. I blink in the bright light, and the heat from the stove feels good. Ruth, in dry clothes, is curled up with a magazine. It is too early to start supper.

In the light I examine her marten. Long, silky, dark brown fur with the bright orange spot on the throat. It is a beauty. We talk over the day's happenings. It has been a good day. Three mink for me, two mink and a marten for Ruth. One mink is worth as much as two days' logging, and a marten is worth as much as two mink.

But there will be days when every trap is buried deep with snow, days when the coves are covered with ice we can't row through, days when the Arctic gales shriek down from the north and the mink stay close to their dens. There will be days when everything goes dead wrong, when the mink seem to know where the traps are and stay clear of them, or pull out of them if they do get caught, and the only catches we make are squirrels and jays and twigs. There will be days when, after looking at a hundred traps, we come in tired, wet, cold and empty-handed. Some say there's no such thing as luck, but I never heard a trapper say it.

After supper, when the dishes are put away, Ruth goes back to her magazine. Her day's work is over. Now I get busy skinning and fleshing the pelts and stretching them on the boards to dry. Those already dry I take off the boards, turn fur side out, and fluff up the fur. Ruth puts down her magazine, comes over, and lays the pelts side by side. She is matching the marten for neck pieces, and matching the dark, glossy fur of the mink. They will go into a coat fit for any millionaire's lady.

And does Ruth want fine furs for her own adornment? She wouldn't wear them. When a trapper's wife wears a fur coat, she says, it looks as if he caught a lot of illegal fur he couldn't sell, so he had it made up for her. When the season is over, the last of the traps taken in, the last pelts dried and admired, Ruth's interest is gone. I can give the pelts to the newsboy if I wish. She is counting the days until she can climb the hills for hooters, or go out and discover new trout streams.

But when the leaves are turning to crimson and gold, when the geese are winging their way south and there's frost in the air, I see a dreamy look in Ruth's eyes. Then I know she is thinking of the trap line and her next question will be, "When does mink season open?"

A few years later, in Neets Bay, our trapping season was near the end. It hadn't been a bad season — mild winter, no bad freezes, and our catch of mink and marten was as good as we'd anticipated. With only a few days left to go, we had begun to shorten our lines so we'd have all our traps up by the last day.

We were eager to get to town. The fur buyers would be doing keener bidding for the fresh-caught pelts, Ruth was anxious to see her mother after more than two months, and we needed to replenish our food supply. Also it would be nice to visit with our friends again. No one is out in the back country in midwinter except the trappers, and each is too busy on his own line to do any visiting. We hadn't talked to anyone in months.

It was evening. I was working with the fur and Ruth was reading, when suddenly she lifted her head, listening. "Wolves," she said, and we both headed for the door.



Out on deck we could hear them plainly, a whole pack, really serenading. Their chorus made the hills ring. They were up in the valley at the head of the bay though in the darkness I couldn't tell exactly where. I stayed out and listened until they quit howling. The wolves and the loons are Alaska's best songsters, I always maintained, and I often stayed out on deck on a winter night until I was nearly frozen, just to listen to the wolves.

Ruth liked to listen to them too, but if it was dark she preferred to do her listening from the launch, anchored well offshore. Not that she was afraid of wolves, she just liked to feel comfortable when that eerie, spine-chilling wail came from somewhere out there in the black of night.

If there were as many wolves in the valley as their howling indicated, I could catch a few and add materially to our winter's income. Next morning, soon after daylight, I was ashore with a load of wolf traps. Back from the beach there was enough snow for good tracking, but I was farther back than I'd expected when I finally came upon their tracks. There were nine wolves in the pack, traveling up the valley on a well-used runway. Following their tracks and searching out the best places to set traps, I went a long way up the valley. The shadows were closing in by the time I had all my traps set, and I had to hurry to get out of the woods before dark.

It had been raining all day, a steady, cold rain, just the kind of weather I like for setting wolf traps, as the rain washes away the human scent, but miserable for the trapper. I was wet to the skin, and as I rowed back to the launch with the wind sweeping across the water, I became numb with cold.

By the time I stepped aboard the launch it was dark, but the cabin was warm and cheerful, the wood fire crackled merrily, and there was the smell of good things cooking. Ruth, busy preparing supper, told me she had caught another big, dark marten, and to celebrate we were having plum pudding for dessert. The pudding sauce was simmering on the edge of the stove.

"Supper's all ready," she announced.

"I'll have to thaw out first," I said. "I'm too cold to eat yet." To hurry up the thawing I stretched a bare leg out near the side of the stove. Somehow Ruth bumped the pan of pudding sauce. It overturned, its boiling contents poured onto my leg, and there it clung and burned.

We got it off as quickly as possible and applied first aid, but the next day I had the biggest water blister I ever saw, from my knee to my ankle. My wolf trapping was at an abrupt end.

My traps were scattered over a wide area, and unmarked, so Ruth would not be able to find them. They would have to wait until my leg healed. Meanwhile, our supplies were low—but if we had meat, we could hold out nicely for quite a while.

Ruth volunteered to go get a deer. Now, in mid-February, the does were heavy with fawn and the bucks were skinny, but a towhead, a last year's fawn, would be good eating and all the meat we'd need. Ruth took the deer rifle and went ashore.

Later she returned, empty-handed but with a self-satisfied look on her face. She had gone to a place where she'd seen deer signs while she was setting marten traps, and after a short stalk she had come upon a deer lying on its bed under a spruce tree. It saw her at once, sprang to its feet, and stood looking at her.

She threw the gun to her shoulder, steadied the sights on the white spot on its throat, tightened her finger on the trigger, then lowered the rifle.

The deer kept looking at her and she kept looking at the deer. It was just the kind she was after. Again she put the gun to her shoulder, steadied the sights, and started to squeeze the trigger. The little deer's ears flicked, Ruth put the gun down. The deer continued to gaze at her with big, inquisitive eyes.

Ruth waved her arm and shouted, "Get out of here before I change my mind!"

With a flick of its tail the deer bounded away.

"I'd have shot it," Ruth muttered as she put a pot of rice on to cook, "if the darned thing had growled at me!"

My leg healed without complications. In a few days I gingerly put on my boots and went out and dug a sack of clams, which held us until I was able to go and get the two wolves I found in my traps.



## Chapter 13

During most of our trapping years the beaver season was opened only for the month of April every fifth year. That was the trapping both Ruth and I liked best. The severe winter weather was past, the days were much longer, the snow and ice were disappearing and signs of spring were everywhere. It was good to get out back to the ponds and lakes, exploring new ground in search of fresh cuttings where beaver had been working. We never passed up a beaver season if we could help it.

So it was with keen anticipation that, in late March of 1935, we outfitted for beaver trapping. We wanted to be out on the ground and ready to start trapping on opening day, and first we had to find the ground. You may have seen beaver in a particular place a few years ago, or even last year, but still you have no assurance of

finding them there now. If their feed became scarce, whole colonies would have moved out, or they could have been decimated by wolves or by human predators poaching during the closed season.

We checked our outfit: hip boots, rain clothes, rubber gloves, wire for the traps. We'd need full gas tanks, plenty of coal—this was before everyone had oil burners—and groceries for at least six weeks. Ruth always included plenty of lunch material in her grocery order for beaver trapping. We usually went together, stayed all day and had our lunch beside a camp fire in a dry spot under some big spruce.

As she finished her list, Ruth said, "How about taking a bottle of rum? You might fall into the creek again."

She was referring to an incident of the previous winter, when, on a bitter cold day, I started to go up one of the mainland streams. The tide was low, so the creek came out across a quarter of a mile of flats. These flats would be submerged at the time I planned to get back to the beach, so I was taking the skiff up the creek where I could get it at high tide.

I rowed to the mouth of the creek, stepped out, and began wading upstream, pulling the skiff after me. The creek was deep enough to float the skiff nicely, until it grounded on a submerged boulder. I took the rope in both hands and pulled hard. You guessed it. The rope broke.

A fellow's feet do not move very fast in gum boots, running backward against the creek current, and my feet couldn't quite keep up with me. I landed flat on my back in knee-deep, icy water.

The north wind was howling down from the glacier peaks. By the time I'd recovered my hat and poured the water out of my boots, icicles were forming on my coat tails. I shoved the skiff off the rock and headed for home as fast as I could row. By the time I got there my clothes were frozen stiff as boards. Fortunately, Ruth was aboard with a good fire going. But maybe next time Ruth would be with me, the stove at home might be cold, and home might be miles away.

"Yes," I said, "we may need a bottle of rum."

One wet morning we arrived at the place where we planned to make our first survey for beaver. It had been raining ever since we got up, not storming, but one of those thick, fine, quiet "wet rains." We paid little attention to the wet rain, but it can add up to



a lot of water running down your neck and into your boots if you stay out long.

I anchored the launch in a sheltered cove, put out a shore line, and went inside. Ruth was busy at the stove. "I'm going with you," she announced. "We'll have an early lunch first."

I didn't argue. I knew she wouldn't stay home when I was going to explore new lakes. I did warn her that it would be a wet trip, although I knew that wouldn't change her mind. Rain never bothered her.

It hadn't been long since breakfast, but we stuffed down some food, put on our hip boots and rain clothes, and took off. With no lunch and no traps, we were traveling light. I carried an ax, as I'd been a logger so long I felt naked without an ax in my hand, and Ruth took her .22 rifle just in case she heard a wolf howl. Not that she expected to kill a wolf with her .22, she just felt more comfortable holding it tight, when she heard that eerie howl.

We had never gone inland at this place, but it had been air-mapped and I had studied the map carefully. It showed two creeks coming into the bay a short distance apart, one reaching straight back and draining two lakes, the second draining three other lakes only a short distance to one side. By going up one creek and coming down the other we could easily investigate all five lakes in one day. Air-mapping was still a recent development, but I had found the maps thoroughly accurate so I trusted them implicitly.

We'd heard that a prospector had cut a trail up along the first creek, so we left the skiff midway between the two and went to the first one. We found the trail, well blazed and brushed out, but a scant half mile from the beach we came to an old burn where the second growth and the crisscrossed fallen trees made such an impenetrable thicket that the trail-maker had given up. Even the deer and the bear avoided this maze. Without so much as a game trail to follow, we tried going up the middle of the creek. Though we avoided the brush, we had to climb over scores of fallen trees. It was slow and tiresome.

At last we came out of the burn into open meadows and soon we could see the first lake, just as it was shown on the map. At the outlet of the lake we found a large beaver dam, freshly repaired, with fresh beaver cuttings all about. As the beaver had all the brush mowed down, we found good going around the edge

of the lake. Beaver sign up at the second lake was even more encouraging, and there was another big dam.

Spring was early that year. Although there were a few patches of ice in the lake, the snow was gone and from the grass meadows we flushed the first spring birds—juncos, sparrows and a few robins. Fresh deer tracks were numerous and their trails, where they forded the creeks, were well used. In the wet spots, skunk cabbage was thrusting up its first yellow sprouts and the beaver had been digging in the swales for the roots. The tracks of a lone wolf followed the lake shore. He had been trying to waylay a beaver for dinner.

The country around the lake was fairly open, with grassy swales and narrow muskegs spaced among low ridges and knolls crowned with red and yellow cedar and bull pine. Later in the season we spent many pleasant days there, tending our traps and, when the day's work was finished, resting in the sun on a mossy bank, listening to the hoot of the blue grouse and watching the trout leap in the lake while we waited for the billy can to boil.

Waiting for the billy can to boil.



But that first day would have been more pleasant without the rain, which gradually increased to a steady downpour. Although we were prepared for rain and used to it, a pouring rain never lends enchantment to a hike in the woods.

We went up along the shore of the second lake to a point which, according to the map, was closest to the other lakes. A ten-minute climb took us to the crest of the low, open ridge between them. Below us lay a lake a quarter of a mile long and nearly round, just as shown on the map. Sure of our position now, we dropped down to the shore of this lake, then down to the middle one in the chain, and on to the lower lake. We were well pleased to find the map accurate in its detail, and more pleased to find all the lakes well stocked with beaver. With only the wolves for competitors, we were sure to make a good catch.

It was getting toward evening but we were not worried. The map showed it was only a short way to the outlet of the lake, then not more than a mile down the creek to salt water and our skiff.

The going was a bit tough to the place where, according to the map, we would find the outlet of the lake. There we found instead, to our dismay, a high, timbered ridge. There was no creek. We kept following the lake shore until we found the outlet, at the opposite corner.

The low-hanging rain clouds were blotting the mountain peaks from view so we had no landmarks to go by, and you don't follow a compass course through that kind of country. It would lead you up to the tops of sharp peaks, and down into deep canyons you couldn't get out of. You would encounter jumbles of house-size boulders, brush thickets you couldn't crawl through, fallen trees you couldn't climb over. You follow game trails that lead through the passes, or creeks that lead eventually to the place you want to reach.

Our senses told us this creek was heading in the wrong direction, but the air map definitely showed that the creek draining this lake and that creek entering the bay near our boat were one and the same. Besides, the direction in which a creek starts has little to do with the place where it ends, for a creek follows the contours of the land and may change directions a number of times on its way.

Probably the main reason we struck out down the creek so trustingly was that we saw an attractive route ahead. Immediately

below the lake, the creek entered a parklike forest of spruce and ran through quiet pools and over gentle riffles between low, green, mossy banks. To the side was a series of grassy glades, free from entangling brush or fallen tree trunks, and down through the glades was a wide, well-beaten game trail. The main game trails always follow the easiest routes.

But, be it the lonely trail through the forest or the walk of life through the crowded city, the path of least resistance often leads to trouble. So it was with the attractive path we chose to follow. We had gone only a short distance when steep, brushy hillsides crowded out the low banks and open meadows, tall hemlocks replaced the spruce trees, and the wide game trail kept branching off until it ceased to exist. No longer did the creek gurgle playfully over gentle riffles between quiet pools; it tumbled through bouldery rapids and over low waterfalls between high, rocky walls. Anxiously we rounded each bend, hoping the creek would turn toward our boat, but it kept bearing in the other direction and the mountains between us and our boat grew higher and more rugged.

The gloom of evening was settling fast, and the creek was getting bigger — too big to be the one which entered our bay. Of course, we tried to console ourselves, the heavy rain was swelling the creek.

When we knew we had come far enough to have reached the beach and we were still far back in the mountains, we became alarmed. Definitely we were following the wrong creek. But it was too late to turn back. It was getting dark, we were wet to the skin, and there's no dry wood for a fire in a rain-soaked forest of big hemlocks. We had to go on.

Feeling our way over the slippery boulders when we waded the stream, and fending the spiny devil's clubs away from our faces when waterfalls and deep pools forced us to take to the banks, we made slower and slower progress as the darkness gathered.

At long last we could see an opening ahead. Finally we came out onto the beach where we could look out across the inlet and get our bearings, and our hearts sank as we recognized familiar landmarks. We were five miles from our boat.

Five miles of rocky beach where we couldn't make a mile an hour, and no driftwood for a fire. We looked at the forest, dark

and wet and gloomy, its trees four and five feet in diameter, the only dry wood their branches, and the lowest of them fifty feet high. We were tired but we couldn't stop to rest. Wet as we were, we had to keep moving or we'd get chilled. We also were hungry.

It was just as dark now as it was going to be, pitch black in the canyons but not quite so dark on the beach. We could find our way. My eyes were always better in the dark than Ruth's so I took the lead, picking the best route I could find, Ruth following with no complaint.

The beach was a jumble of slab rock, all canted at an angle, all wet, slimy and slippery. We slipped and fell continually. The drenching rain was still coming down so when we looked to our footing, or went down on all fours, it pelted our necks and ran down our backs inside our clothing. When we reached up, rain ran down our sleeves. It slapped our legs, trickled into our boots until we could feel it squashing between our toes. We were soft from a couple of months of town living, and it had been so long since that early lunch, I couldn't remember having eaten at all.

When bluffy headlands blocked our way, or we decided the beach was impossible, we would take to the woods. It was darker, and the thick tangles of brush, the big logs and prickly devil's clubs made the going even slower and more difficult, but at least it was softer when we fell.

Ruth was getting awfully tired, I knew, as she was falling so often. When she went down she would grunt. Sometimes she would gasp, and I knew that meant she'd be wearing another black-and-blue spot for a couple of weeks. Then she would get slowly to her feet and come on, still without complaint. I urged her to wait or come on slowly while I went ahead and came back to get her in the boat.

"No," she said. "If you should fall and get hurt, or couldn't get the boat, I'd be marooned here. I'll keep up with you. I'll make it."

And so we plodded on, feeling our way, slipping and stumbling and falling. We couldn't travel fast enough to keep warm. Whenever I waited for Ruth, my teeth would chatter. We were too miserable for conversation. I hadn't said a word in half an hour—and if I had spoken my mind, I wouldn't dare put it on paper.

That's when Ruth began to giggle. Trust her to come up with something funny in a difficult situation, but this time her wry

humor irked me. "What in blazes are you laughing about?" I growled.

"Know the first thing I'm going to do when we get to the boat? I'm going to have me a nice, big hot rum!"

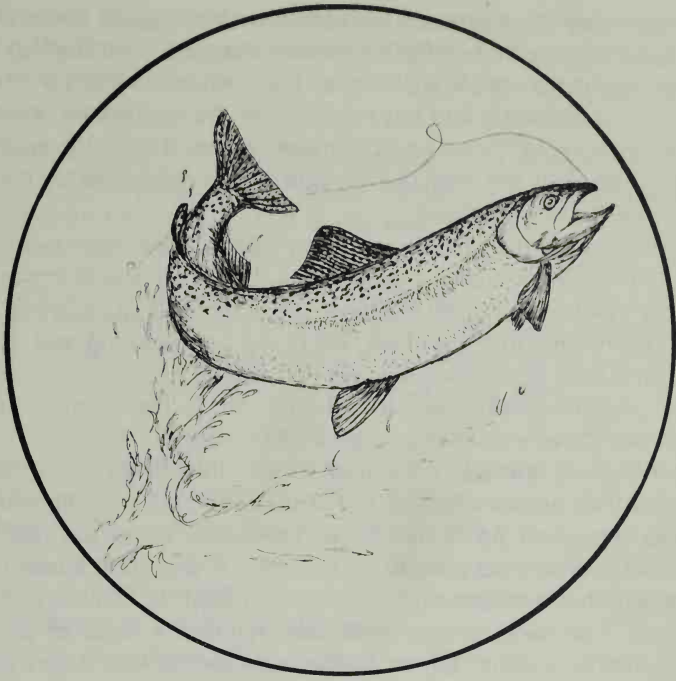
I had to laugh with Ruth, because we finally hadn't brought any rum. This was one time we'd really need a drink, but we didn't have it.

Maybe it was the laugh, or maybe we were getting numb to our discomfort. Anyway, things went better after that. Soon we came to smooth beach and had good walking the rest of the way to the skiff.

It was good to get home, good to shuck our wet clothes, hover around the fire, drink hot coffee, and laugh about our misadventure. It was nearly midnight when we reached the launch. I don't know what time it was when we sat down to eat.

When I made up a pack of beaver traps, preparing to go back to those lakes, Ruth said, "Wait until I get my boots on. I'm going with you."





## Chapter 14

Winstanley Creek enters Behm Canal from the mainland just below Winstanley Island. A good-sized stream, it comes boiling down over the boulders with white water clear down to the low tide mark, and in the spring, when it is high from melting snow, you don't cross it. In late summer you might cross in a few places by leaping from boulder to boulder, if you're catty enough.

When you get past the first bend, only a short way up, you find the creek foaming down a deep, narrow canyon in surging cataracts, low falls and deep black pools. On the left it is determinedly undermining a vertical cliff 200 feet high. On the right there's a mess of house-size boulders, rock bluffs, fallen trees and tangled brush.

I went up through the canyon once by wading, at times clear to my armpits, but when Ruth was with me we turned back at the mouth of the canyon. We'd have all the trout we wanted by then, anyway — steelheads and big rainbows in the springtime, smaller rainbows and cutthroats up to fourteen inches later in the season. They were well fed and plump, and in the white water they'd strike fast and fight hard.

From out in the middle of Behm Canal you can see that Winstanley Creek drains a wide valley, but when we first started fishing there, in the good old days, we could only guess what lay up in the valley. In those days, we could go exploring and come back and brag about the lakes we had found. That fun is all past. Now, any cheechako can sit at home, study his air maps, and "discover" every beaver puddle in the country.

In the early thirties, Jack and Bruce Johnstone and I went prospecting up on the big red mountain back of Winstanley Island. We went up from Checat Lake and when we reached timberline, where we were to make camp, it was such a beautiful, clear day that we dumped our packs and kept on climbing to the summit. The bare, craggy peak commanded a view of all the surrounding country. On its farther side we looked down upon two placid lakes nestled in a timbered valley, the headwaters of Winstanley Creek.

The next spring Ruth and I were up in back of Winstanley Harbor, hunting hooters. Following a game trail along the edge of the tundra, we came to an old log cabin secluded in a timbered pocket between two knolls. It was built well, of cedar logs with a shake roof, evidently a white man's cabin and probably he was a trapper, but it had not been occupied for many years.

An old blazed trail led away from the cabin, so we followed it, but the blazes were few and far between. Whoever made them was a good woodsman who knew where he was going and didn't need many marks to point the way. We finally lost them altogether. While searching for them we came out onto the brink of a high cliff and looked down into the dark canyon where, directly below our feet, Winstanley Creek murmured and growled.

Later I learned that Ed Horton and Cal Connel had trapped this area twenty-odd years earlier.

One evening in August found us anchored in the sheltered cove behind Winstanley Island, wondering again, at the sight of familiar

landmarks, about the blazed trail we had lost back there among the cedar knolls. When I mentioned the lakes I had seen from the top of Red Mountain, I knew from the sparkle in Ruth's eyes what she was thinking.

"Well, why not?" I said. "This is a safe place to leave the boat. The trail must lead to the lakes. We lost it crossing that last muskeg, and if we can't find it, we won't need it. The first lake can't be more than a mile or two."

I was going to add that the cutthroats always bite best in August, but Ruth was no longer listening. She was rummaging in her tackle box for flies and spinners. I put out a shore line, just in case a wind should come up while we were gone.

The valleys were still in shadow when we hit the beach next morning and started climbing the hill. We carried our usual outfit for exploring trips—lunch, of which we always took plenty, then wished we'd brought more; a billy can, for half the pleasure of the trip was having a camp fire and a can of hot tea; the .22 rifle, though we didn't expect to shoot anything; camera, as we always found opportunities for good pictures, and a trout rod. With one rod we could find out whether there were any trout, and if there were, with one rod we could catch all we wanted.

We picked up the old blazed trail leading up onto a high ridge, which was easy to follow even though the blazes were not. When we caught the glint of broad waters below us, we turned down through the brush like thirsty cattle stampeding to a water hole.

We came out of a forest of red and yellow cedar and onto the bank of a lake half a mile long, the lower lake I had seen from the top of Red Mountain. Its dark, placid water reflected the surrounding hills, and the reflections, we were quick to note, were distorted frequently by the surfacing of trout. Our rush was over. We'd found the lake and there were fish in it. In our own time we'd find out what kind of fish, and how big, but first we sat down on a mossy knoll to rest and enjoy the beauty of the spot.

At the upper end of the lake the big timber came down to the water's edge. Toward the lower end the gentle slope was fringed by a grassy meadow. The outlet was a narrow channel cut down into solid bedrock, which high water had swept as clean as a concrete sidewalk.

Finally Ruth strung up the fishing rod and insisted, as usual, that I make the first cast. I, as usual, refused. I wanted to take a smoke, do some exploring and look for game sign.

The meadow was crisscrossed with deer trails. At the lake's edge were mink tracks. A beaver had cut a bush and dragged it into the water. I was down studying the outlet when I heard a shout from Ruth and saw her rod arced in a lively battle. Just as I reached her she beached a speckled beauty, a fifteen-inch cutthroat.

It was my turn next, and I had seen a spot that intrigued me. The creek at the outlet ran down a swift riffle into a deep, dark pool carved out of solid bedrock. My lure had barely hit the water at the near edge of the eddy, when there was a flash and the line went down into the bottom of the pool, then out into the swift water. I maneuvered long and carefully before I landed that eighteen-inch rainbow.

We moved back up the lake to the inlet. I think I've never seen trout more plentiful, or more ravenous. They took everything and anything we threw at them. Any lure would no more than touch the water than a dozen would be after it. We kept what we wanted and released many more.

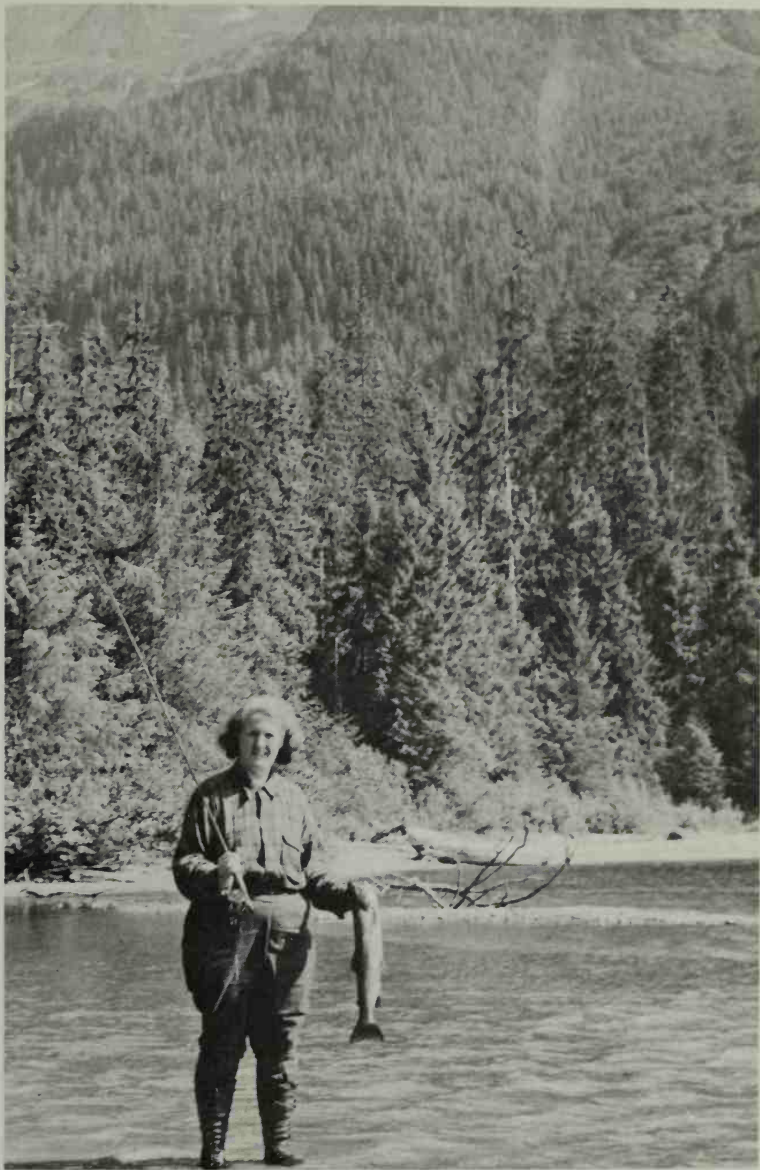
Back in the woods we found another trapper's cabin, its more recent sign of occupancy some newspapers dated ten years before. It was proof again that no matter where you go, someone has been there ahead of you.

Up a short stretch of creek we came to the second lake, which reached for miles back to the farther peaks. Fishing there was slow. With the excitement of discovery over, we realized it had been a long time since breakfast, so we built a fire to boil the billy can.

Ruth had the tea and sugar mixed in a paper container, to be dumped in when the water came to a boil, and stirred with a twig. Then the can, its edge cleaned of soot with a bit of wet moss, was set between us.

We took our time with lunch, lazing in the sun and enjoying the scenery. Across the lake, the forested slope rose steeply to timberline, and above was the bold peak of Red Mountain, from which I had first seen these lakes. A sharp point of land projected into the lake about a third of the way up the south shore, but we could see the far end, against the precipitous side of a high, bare,

Ruth beached this beauty.



straight-backed ridge. It looked interesting. We would go there someday, to prospect, or hunt goats or ptarmigan, or just to go.

A huge logjam blocked the outlet of the big lake and afforded the only crossing. Well-worn game trails converged there, worn deep by generations of bear and wolves, wolverine and marten, squirrels and porcupines. We did more fishing just to see how big the trout were, but returned them all to the water, and when the shadows began to lengthen we headed for home. It had been a great day.

When we told, in Ketchikan, about finding the lakes and about the trout fishing, no one seemed to have known that the lakes existed. The editor of the *Alaska Sportsman Magazine*, Emery Tobin, heard about our trip and asked me to write an account of it, and so I submitted my first article to his magazine. In it I said that Ruth and I undoubtedly were the first to fish those lakes with sport gear, and my statement was quickly challenged by an old trapper who said he had caught trout there many years before. I asked for details. He told me he had fished through the ice at the head of the lake, and had caught trout two feet long.

"Go back and read the story again," I told him. "It says we were the first to fish there with rod and reel."

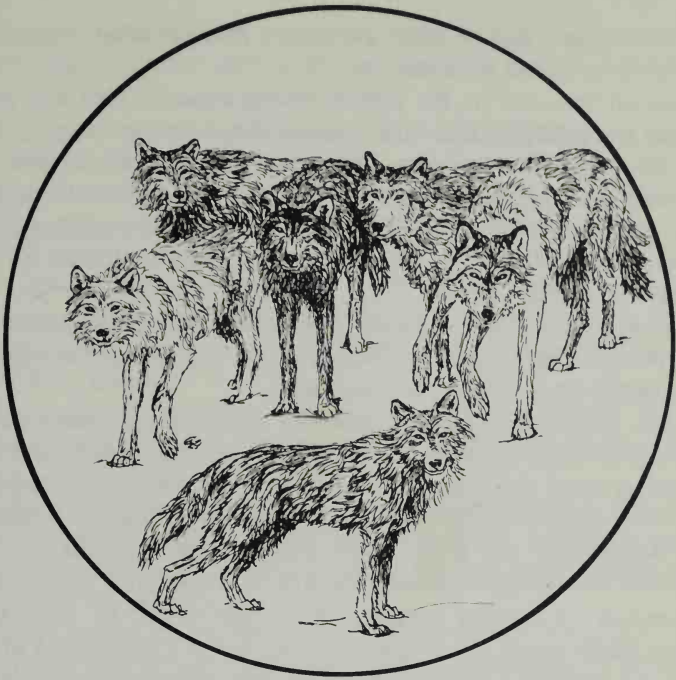
"You win," he conceded. "I used a line tied to the tip of a crooked willow pole."

Because of my article in the *Alaska Sportsman*, the Forest Service built a trail to the lakes, put boats on the big lake, and erected a shelter cabin on that point along the south shore. Winstanley Lakes immediately became one of the popular spots for sportsmen in quest of the big cutthroat trout.

And how did Ruth and I enjoy the improvements? We never went back. We found Winstanley Lakes in a primitive wilderness, the habitat of the deer and the bear, the wolf and the wolverine, when the most recent evidence of human intrusion was ten years old. We never cared for man-made trails and shelter cabins. We would rather follow the trails of the wild creatures and sleep under a spruce in the big, clean outdoors, than use the litter-strewn trails and cabins of careless campers.

The "good old days" were truly good — the days when we could mash brush to discover our own new fishing spots, and safely say we were the first to fish there with rod and reel.





## Chapter 15

On a calm day in mid-April of the following spring, Ruth and I were cruising down Behm Canal on our way to town. Passing Spacious Bay, I looked toward the hills of the mainland. Somewhere in there, according to an old prospector's story, was the Lost Rocker Mine.

We usually followed up such leads. Although they seldom panned out, there was always a chance of finding something worthwhile. We had never been ashore there, and now we had plenty of time. I rolled the wheel to head for the mouth of the creek, and called down to Ruth, "Want to go ashore?" That was a foolish question. I just wanted to invite her before she announced she was going.

Spring had but recently arrived, and although the creeks had opened up and the beaches were bare, the higher ground was still covered with snow. Panning in snow water would be mighty cold

on the fingers, but at least we might find whether there was anything to come back to.

Leaving the skiff at the mouth of the creek, I took my pick, shovel and gold pan, and Ruth, always watching for hooters, took her .22. When I hadn't found a single color in several pans, we decided to try farther upstream. The creek came down through a deep canyon filled with big, slippery boulders. If we went up over a low ridge we'd have much better going, and we could hit the creek above the canyon.

Halfway up the timbered slope we encountered snow, thin at first but gradually increasing in depth. At the top of the ridge it was nearly knee-deep, soft, and wet.

I was in the lead breaking trail, my attention concentrated on picking the best route. Ruth, following in my footsteps, was free to look around. Coming out of the timber, we reached the brow of the hill and saw the open top of the ridge only a few yards ahead. We would clear the brush, then stop to rest and look.

With some ten feet between us and the open area, we were in the center of a snow-covered, waist-high patch of tanglefoot yellow cedar brush, tripping and falling, when Ruth tugged at my coat and pointed. I looked. The open ridge sloped gently upward to the left some 200 yards, to a flat-topped knoll. There, jet black against the snow, were six wolves standing in a row, heads down, ears pricked forward, watching us intently.

"Aren't they pretty!" Ruth said. Then she gasped, "They're coming!"

They certainly were coming, all six of them, in great bounds, down the hill and straight at us. Dropping my prospecting tools, I took the rifle Ruth pressed into my hands and worked the bolt to see that it was loaded. It was empty.

In hooter hunting there's no call for fast action. You may be an hour locating the bird, and then you have the rest of the day to do the shooting. Ruth had left the gun empty for safer going through the thick brush, but had dropped a full box of ammunition into her pocket. Now she was tugging frantically at her pocket with her hands wet and numb. When she finally got the box it slipped through her fingers and buried itself in the soft snow.

A hurried glance at the wolves: halfway to us, coming fast. Dropping to our knees, we got into each other's way as we clawed down into the snow. The box retrieved, we stood up. One

wolf got to the edge of the brush patch, not ten feet away, and stood staring at me with fangs bared, yellow eyes gleaming. The others swept on around and behind us.

Trying to watch in all directions at once, cramming bullets desperately into the gun, I was recalling all too vividly an experience of only a few weeks earlier. With this same gun I'd shot a wolf in a trap. At ten paces I had emptied the gun into him, doing no apparent damage. Six shots of long-rifle ammunition through a brand new Winchester rifle, yet he was still on his feet, savagely fighting the trap. So I had little hope of killing any of these wolves, but I did intend to do some damage before they pulled us down.

The gun fully loaded, I swung at the wolf above us. He was gone. We looked around. The rest were gone too. Not a wolf in sight.

After a few minutes we moved cautiously out into the open. There was not a sign of a living thing anywhere. Except for the big footprints in the snow, we could have thought those wolves were all in our imagination.

Those tracks plainly revealed the strategy of their attack. Four members of the pack had taken stands at intervals so they had completely surrounded us, none of them more than twenty feet from us. The other two had moved below and behind us until they came to our tracks. Then, by signal or by common impulse, they had gone, moving single file down into the canyon beyond the ridge.

Still studying their tracks, we went up to the knoll where we had first seen them. The soft snow disclosed their movements so plainly, we even knew what the wolves had been thinking.

On our way up from the beach we had seen numerous fresh deer tracks. The wolves, coming from the mountains, had reached the open ridge and smelled the deer below them. One of the pack had gone down into the timber to drive the deer up, while the rest had lain down on the brow of the knoll to watch and wait.

We'd left the boat in a light rain, so we both wore water-repellent coats. They were brown. My hat was brown. Ruth's golden-brown hair was uncovered. When we came up the slope, only our brown heads and brown shoulders visible, the wolves mistook us for the deer they were expecting, and when they saw us stumbling in that tangled brush patch, they thought

it an ideal place to close in on us. When they got a closer look and got our scent, they realized their mistake and left us quickly as possible.

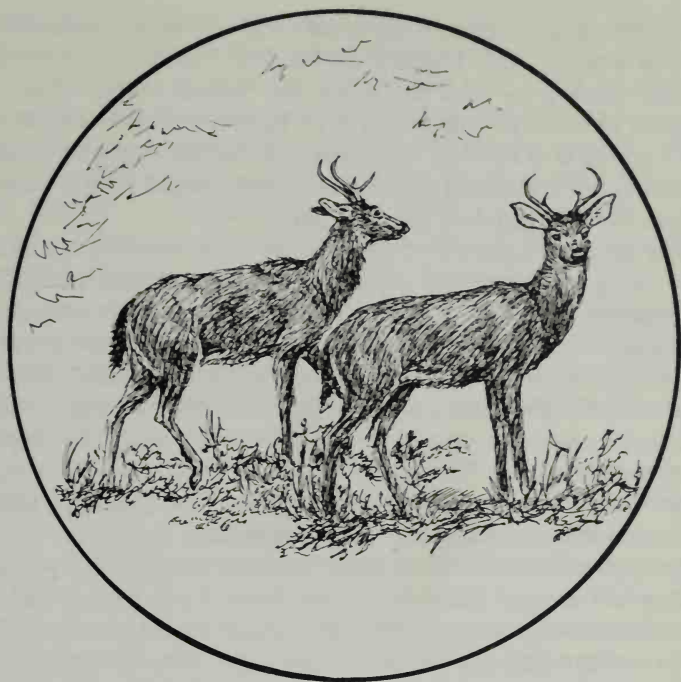
What awed us then, and caused us to marvel afterwards, was the deathlike silence of their stalk. We heard absolutely no sound made by them. Maybe our hearts were pounding so loudly as to drown out their sound, but I don't think so. Although they came in great twelve-foot bounds, and part of the pack swept by within fifteen feet of us, they moved as silently as a gull in flight, and just as silently, they left.

The snow was too deep for our prospecting venture, so we started back to the beach. We were just leaving the ridge when, from a timbered knoll across the canyon, there came a long, mournful howl, starting low, rising to a high pitch, then dropping to a low, drawn-out wail. Other voices joined, until the chorus made the mountains ring. We stopped and listened. The howling continued for several minutes without interruption, then abruptly ceased. We neither saw nor heard the wolves again.

Maybe they were voicing disappointment at being deprived of a warm meal. Maybe they were crying defiance at us from a safe distance. Or maybe, like small boys, they just felt like making a lot of noise. I never did learn why wolves howl, though I do know their howl is not a hunting cry. They are not running when they howl. I've watched them. They are dancing on their front feet when they start, and standing with noses pointed toward the sky for the long, deep wail.

I've always been glad Ruth didn't have the .22 loaded that day. After more than fifty years in wolf country, I am firmly convinced that timber wolves—at least those in western North America—will not attack human beings.

When those wolves charged down on us, I certainly thought they were attacking, and I still believe that was their intent up to the moment they discovered we were two-footed animals. If the gun had been loaded, I'd have been shooting, and shooting fast. The wolves would have scattered and fled, and naturally we'd have credited the gun with scaring them away. My conviction would have been reversed, and as long as we lived we'd have a hair-raising tale to tell about the time Ruth's fondness for hooter hunting, and her habit of taking her gun on a prospecting trip, saved us from being torn limb from limb by a pack of bloodthirsty killers.



## Chapter 16

Ruth had her own rifle when she was eight years old. Reared with a houseful of older brothers, she competed with them in all outdoor activities, and she excelled at shooting. She excelled in hunting, too. Her father had made a living as a meat hunter for the railroad camps when the first iron trail was being built across the Rockies, and Ruth had learned the art from him.

She was not a killer. She preferred watching game to shooting it, and the fun was in seeing the animals before they saw her. When we hunted together she always tried to see the game before I saw it, and usually she did. Then she'd say, "You shoot it."

One thing could start Ruth shooting to kill, however, and that was a good competition. One year, while the Tongass Trading Company in Ketchikan was putting on annual hunting



competitions, a set of stainless steel cooking utensils was offered for the woman who brought in the first two-point buck, and another nice prize was listed for the woman who killed the heaviest buck. After the third one of Ruth's friends bragged that she'd be the one to cook in those pots, Ruth's competitive spirit was thoroughly aroused and she promised herself they'd have to get up before breakfast to beat her.

After we went back out to work, Ruth talked hunting and prizes until I hung my falling saw under a dry cedar, chucked my logging jacks under a stump, and took her off to the deer pastures.

I knew several likely spots where, early in the season in previous years, I had been able to get deer close to the beach. We tried them all. After three days of hunting and seeing nothing but does and fawns, we were convinced we'd have to climb for a buck if we were to get one. The weather was still warm and dry and the bucks were still on the mountaintops, away from the flies, feeding on the tender leaves of the late deer lilies.

Many times I had hunted a high mountain ridge back in another inlet, and I'd never failed to get my buck there, so I pulled the anchor and away we went. We were happy to find no other boats in the sheltered cove at the foot of the mountain. Just outside the cove I cut the motor and, as we drifted, studied the mountain to refresh my memory. The whole face of the mountain was precipitous, with steep, narrow gullies, huge fallen tree trunks, and sheer rock walls rising above some of the worst patches of devil's clubs I ever got tangled up in. But I had cruised out a route by which we could avoid all the rough going—much longer, to be sure, but a gentler slope and good traveling all the way to the summit.

The timberline meadows looked fresh, green and enticing. They also looked a long way up. True, I'd packed deer down from those meadows, I'd lost track of how many, but then I'd been meat hunting and I'd brought them down without the heads—and I didn't have more than fifty years behind me then, either. Packing out a trophy deer, with the head and antlers and all the legs, meant added weight and a more awkward load. My shoulders ached at the thought. Oh, well. If Ruth got her prize deer up there, I'd get it down to the beach for her.

After anchoring the boat in the cove, I rowed ashore to look for tracks. Man tracks. There were none. The place had not been hunted and we had it all to ourselves. Our success was assured.



Just after sundown we saw a boat coming up the inlet. Opposite our cove, where those aboard could see our boat, it turned and came in. It was a local fishing boat and I recognized the owner, an old-country Scandinavian who had few friends because of his underhanded ways on the fishing grounds. With him were his two 'teen-age sons. They asked whether we were deer hunting. I replied that we intended to hunt here in the morning. They talked a few minutes among themselves, then backed off a little way and dropped the anchor.

There's a thousand miles of shoreline in these parts, with plenty of good deer hunting accessible to all comers, and when Alaskans find another party ahead of them in one spot, it is their custom to move on. Well, maybe this boat was just anchoring for the night. We hoped so.

We planned to start early and get up to the hunting ground before the deer bedded down for the day. When the alarm roused us our neighbors were already astir, stowing things into their rowboat by flashlight. After we'd finished our breakfast we had to wait for enough light that we could find our way in the woods. Our neighbors waited too. When we started ashore they scrambled into their boat and followed.

Ruth, little and short-legged, was a persistent climber, but slow. In her own good time, she could get to the top. But if Ruth went slowly, the other hunters went just as slowly. When we stopped, they stopped. They never did come up to us, yet they kept us in sight. Their plan was quite evident. They didn't know the hunting ground but they knew I did, and they were letting me guide them to it.

I'd have had fun if I'd been alone. Past fifty though I was, I knew I could easily lose any fisherman who ever climbed the hill, and I'd have enjoyed losing those three. Over there to the right, beneath that perpendicular rock wall, was a devil's club patch where they could do their hunting. They could hunt for a way out of the tangle, while they wondered where I'd gone.

With Ruth along, all I could do was lead those three intruders on the best route up the mountain.

Eventually, leaving the big cedars and spruce and the tangles of huckleberry bushes behind, we entered park-like stands of hemlock. Still we climbed, until the alpine meadows opened up above. Then the other hunters scrambled past us and were soon

200 yards ahead. Just after they reached the first meadow we heard a rifle shot, and when we came up we found them dressing out a spike buck.

The father, who had shot it, kept complaining, "It's not fit. It's not fit," meaning it was not fat enough. We congratulated them on their kill and moved on.

A few minutes later I eased up the steep side of a knoll to peek into a little secluded meadow thickly carpeted with the round green leaves of the deer lily. In the center of the meadow, fifty yards away, stood a two-point buck.

As on our trout fishing trips we took only one rod, so on our hunts we took one gun. If it was Ruth's hunt, I was guide, gun-bearer and packer, but she had to do the shooting to claim the trophy. Now I motioned to Ruth and handed her the rifle.

The buck caught the movement and turned to stare. At the crack of the rifle he dropped in his tracks, his neck broken. Ruth had her trophy deer. Now, if we could get it to town before some other woman brought in a two-pointer, she'd have her cooking utensils.

He was round and sleek and rolling fat, a much bigger deer than I'd first thought. I field-dressed him and then, as it was still early in the day and we had our lunch with us, we left him lying there while we went on up for the pleasure of the climb.

One of my favorite spots was a short distance above, a green meadow that lay in the shadow just under the rim of the ridge. We approached carefully and peeked down. Two deer were crossing the meadow. At the farther edge they turned to look back. They were two-pointers, about the size of the one Ruth had killed. They stood staring at us not fifty yards away and then, their curiosity satisfied, disappeared beneath the trees.

As we were nearing timberline we were stopped by a loud snort from the knoll above. After a minute there came another snort, then the loud thump-thump-thump of a deer bounding away, giving warning to all that hunters were coming. We didn't see her but we knew she was a doe. Her warning didn't carry far, or was disregarded, for out in the open, in the bright sunshine, another doe and her fawn continued feeding.

We passed the last stunted hemlocks, just naturally gravitating through patches of copper bush and across slippery beds of heather toward the bare, craggy peak, and we didn't stop until we

reached the very top of the highest pinnacle. There on the soft side of a rock we sat down to rest and enjoy the scenery while we ate our lunch.

Below us was spread the panorama of mountains and valleys, salt-water channels and inlets, islands and bays. From between dark, timbered ridges came the silvery glint of secluded, nameless lakes. Far below was the cove where our boat and its neighbor were anchored, the only visible sign of civilization in all that vast expanse, and over it all was the stillness, disturbed only by the sounds of distant waterfalls wafted on the summer breeze to seem close by, then muted to a mere whisper.

Suddenly, from below, a rifle shot boomed once, twice. Then the echoes rumbled and rolled through the canyons until they died away in the distance. One of the other hunters had found game.

Directly in front of us the rock wall dropped sheer for a hundred feet, then sloped steeply down into a small valley. Presently the two boys emerged from the woods down there and worked their way up toward us, their rifles held at the ready. I whistled, and waved when they looked up. They soon spotted us up there silhouetted against the sky, waved back, then stood looking as if trying to decide what we were hunting away up there. I don't know what they concluded but I guess they weren't hunting it. They turned and went back.

It was with reluctance that we finally got up to leave, but it was always that way. No matter how long we sat up on the top of a peak, we never were sated with seeing by the time we had to leave.

Ruth's deer appeared to be just as we'd left it. I tied the legs for packing and Ruth helped me boost it up onto my shoulders. It was a lot heavier than I'd expected. Possibly it would take the prize for the heaviest deer, too.

A convenient mossy hump soon tempted me to drop my load and adjust the straps, which were already cutting unbearably into the flesh. I would have sore shoulders for several days. But I didn't mind. I wouldn't be working because we'd be taking the deer to town. It would be weighed and put on display.

I pictured it hanging there with an attached card announcing, "Wt. 140 lbs. Shot by MRS. RUTH JACKSON." People passing by would stop to admire it and read the card, and the hunters,

seeing a woman's name, would look for the bullet mark. They would find it square center through the neck, just below the head, where it would spoil the least possible amount of meat, and they would know my wife was an expert shot.

Well, maybe it didn't weigh quite 140 pounds, but it felt like it and then some. I went ahead, picking the best route, while Ruth followed with the rifle. We hadn't gone far when she said, "That deer's back is broken."

"Can't be," I answered. "You hit it in the neck and it dropped on soft ground."

"I know, but its back is broken," she declared.

Ruth knew what a deer ought to look like. I eased it to the ground, looked inside, and found a mass of shredded meat and pulverized bone. Parting the hair on the back, we found a bullet hole. So, that was the shooting we'd heard! We found another bullet hole right through the middle of the ham.

That long pack to the beach necessitated a good many rest stops, so the sun had set when we rowed out to the launch. One of the boys on the other boat called over, "Dad found your deer and thought it was asleep."

"We know," I retorted. "He's a good shot, too. He hit it dead center."

Probably my sarcasm was wasted, but we exaggerated our efforts as we lifted the big two-pointer up out of our skiff to the deck of the launch. They, with only a skinny little spike, watched with envy. For emphasis I made it clear that Ruth was the one who'd shot this monster. I guess the boys had told their father where they'd seen us last, for he called over to Ruth, "You are tough, Missus. You are absolutely tough."

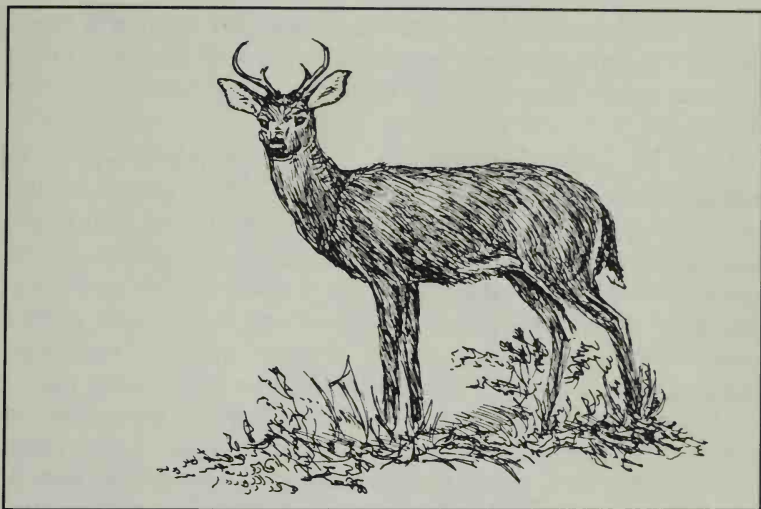
Excusing his crude English, we accepted the intended compliment. I was too tired to take issue about his crude hunting tactics, and I wasn't very angry—yet.

Next morning, somewhat rested, I found something nagging at my brain. Some regulation new in this year's hunting competition. I hadn't been at the sportsmen's club meeting when it was discussed, but now, the more I thought about it, the more apprehensive I became. When we reached town I didn't call for a truck to take the deer up for weighing. Instead I called the chairman of the contest committee.

"All deer must be shot in the head or neck only," he explained. "If they have been hit anywhere else, they are disqualified."

Well, at least we had some nice meat to share with friends. Not deer meat but DEAR meat, I decided as I rubbed my aching shoulders. No, I didn't see red. I saw the prettiest mental picture of three greedy hunters lost in a devil's club patch.

Ruth's reaction was typical. "You can't lose something you never had," she said calmly, but there was a determined set to her jaw which told me that her competitors still had little chance at those prizes.



Coming home to lunch one day a few weeks later, I found Ruth in her hunting togs, her eyes sparkling. She was just bursting with glad tidings, but all she would say was, "We'll take a little trip as soon as you finish eating."

We rowed a scant half mile down the shore, then she directed me to land and led the way up an old logging road. Fifty yards back from the beach, a huge fallen tree blocked the road. "Look on the other side," she said.

I peeked over. There lay a plump two-point buck, neatly dressed out, with a single bullet hole through the neck. Now I knew why she'd been so inattentive while I ate lunch. She was listening for boats and watching for intruders. I also knew I wouldn't get back to my sawing this afternoon. We were going to town.

This time the committee chairman had better news when I called him. "No women have entered deer yet." Ruth took the prize for the first two-pointer entered by a woman, and though this deer wasn't as big as her first one, it was the season's heaviest entry by a woman. For many years thereafter, Ruth was the one who did the cooking in those stainless steel utensils.

Fired with enthusiasm for competitive hunting, Ruth studied the list of prizes carefully when the next year's contest was announced. "To the woman who brings in the first spike buck, a box of silk stockings," she read.

Well, that would be a cinch for Ruth. We were logging in Neets Bay at the time and were well acquainted with all the hunting grounds there. Some of those logged-off areas were alive with deer.

When the season opened we needed the meat, and Ruth wanted her silk stockings, so we planned our first hunt. I directed her to go by a circuitous route and take a stand by the main game trail out of the cut-over ground. After giving her ample time, I waded noisily through the thick brush. I saw plenty of fresh deer sign but I didn't hear any shooting. I found Ruth in the proper place, watching the trail but looking chagrined. As I'd started in, she explained, she saw a doe coming up the trail toward her. It kept coming, walking quietly. Afraid it would get so close it would startle and spook all the rest of the deer, she showed herself when it came within thirty yards. It made a leap down the hill into a thick brush patch, and when its head turned sidewise she saw the spikes, hidden from her before by the ears.

We didn't see another spike buck that season. Neither did any of the other women hunters, so the silk stockings went unclaimed.

I never did try for men's prizes, although there was always a long list of them. Always some of the firsts were taken on the first day, some of them by noon, by the town boys. And the heaviest deer was always 170 pounds or so, taken early in the season when the bucks are fattest, still feeding up around timberline. I killed bucks in that class, but I didn't want the prizes badly enough to pack them down as trophies. I left the head and shanks for the ravens, whacked the body in two through the middle, and packed it down in two loads.



We were working up in West Behm the next summer, and when August rolled around we spoke casually of the coming hunting season. We were not much interested so long as the weather was hot and the deer were high. We would watch along the beaches but put off our serious hunting until cooler weather, as we had no refrigeration on the boat.

On our next trip to town, I opened the evening paper and found the announcement of Tongass's annual hunting contest. As usual there were prizes for the first deer brought in, the first spike, and the first two-pointer. Some town hunter would cop those on opening day. Then the first three-pointer, and four, and so on up to more points than a Sitka blacktail ever thought of growing. And the heaviest deer. I'd still leave that to some husky young fellow. There was the prize for the first woman to bring in a deer. Ruth would let someone else have it this season. And the first moose, the first bear, but we just weren't in a competitive mood.

"To the muscular-legged hunter who brings in the first mountain goat, a Trapper Nelson packboard," I read, and looked up as I felt Ruth tense. Her eyes were shining with a freshly kindled spark of competition. Then a cloud of doubt crossed her face.

"Of course you can," I encouraged her, knowing exactly what she was thinking. She never had killed a goat, but she'd gone on goat hunts with her brothers before I met her, and she still loved to climb mountains. "That'll be a good one," I went on. "A Trapper Nelson is a man's prize. They didn't dream of a muscular-legged woman goat hunter. But I know a dozen mountains where you can get a goat. We'll camp at timberline."

That did it. I knew from her grin that I had myself a job guiding a lady goat hunter.

True, there were a couple of problems. My goat hunts were meat hunts, and I left the head, the heavy hide and the big bones up there. A trophy goat would be a heavy, awkward load. We'd have to select a hunting ground where the two of us could get a goat down to the beach. And Ruth hadn't been shooting anything lately except her little .22. She should have some practice with my .30-'06. But I wasn't worried about either problem. We got our hunting licenses, registered for the contest, and bought an extra bandoleer of service ammunition for target practice.

Back on the job, waiting for the hunting season, we discussed the various hunting grounds and studied the mountains, seeking a favorable combination—a goat population, of course; a route down which we could bring a goat, and a nearby harbor where the launch would be safe from storm and pilferers for two or three days. We considered every mountain from Helm Bay to the Unuk River.

One clear, calm evening we were in Yes Bay, glassing the mountain just north of the entrance. We'd seen goats up there several times but never had gone up. Out in the middle of the bay we cut the motor and let the boat drift while we sat on deck, studying the approaches to the mountain with binoculars. Not satisfied with one angle of vision, we would move the boat and try another. We noticed activity at the dock of the old, abandoned cannery, but we paid little attention until a man in an outboard boat came speeding toward us.

"Are you in trouble?" he shouted when he came close.

To us our action was so commonplace that for the moment I didn't comprehend. Often we would drift in midchannel while we listened to the radio news, or ate lunch, or maybe just watched a sunset.

"I saw you drifting and thought you needed help," he said.

"Oh. No, thanks, we're just admiring the scenery," I answered.

He must have thought we were good ones to stay clear of, for he sped away and we didn't see him again for ten years.

Satisfied with the hunting ground, we turned to Ruth's target practice. The old cannery dock made a good target range, so one evening I set up some targets and got her to work with the big rifle. From the way she consistently slammed the bullets into the bull's-eye, she'd have no trouble with a goat. A fishing party nearby, hearing the bombardment, came over to watch. I invited them to join our fun, but when they examined Ruth's targets, all declined.

Now our only concern was the weather. It continued warm and dry, and the morning before opening date dawned bright and clear. With the launch safely anchored in a secluded cove, we began the long climb up to the goat country. Our outfit was the lightest we could devise as we wanted no extra weight to bring back. We had food for three days; our cooking utensils were mostly tin cans we would discard; our bedding was a two-yard

piece of calico. Forks and spoons we would whittle out of twigs, and our tent would be the starlit sky.

It was warm climbing. We had all day to get to timberline and make camp, so we took our time. Noon found us still down in the big timber. The tinkle of a tiny waterfall led us to a shady canyon, and in a fern-decked nook we built our fire to boil the billy can.

In late afternoon we climbed the last slope through stunted trees and came out onto open ground, the rounded top of a spur of the mountain. There we threw off our packs and sat down.

Below us was the timbered slope we'd been so many sweaty hours climbing. Below and beyond, the lakes and the bays, the inlets and the channels gleamed silvery in the late afternoon sunshine, and mountain range after mountain range stretched away into the hazy blue of distance.

Above, the bold, bare granite peak dominated the whole country, its precipitous slope streaked with slides between protrusions of jumbled rock and sheer granite walls. Against the dark gray of the bare rock was an intricate pattern of green, the nutritious bunchgrass of the mountains, growing on narrow shelves. There, close to the protection of the cliffs, the mountain goats fed, and there we had come to hunt.

Below the cliffs were the long talus slopes with waist-high patches of copper bush and dark green fields of heather, slippery to walk across but nice to sit on and toboggan down, to rest weary legs. Here, wildflowers never seen near the beach were disappointingly devoid of fragrance but attractive nonetheless to bees and little blue butterflies. This was timberline, where the grass and the forest met. Here we would camp.

Along the top of this spur ridge was a series of low, grass-topped knolls, and a quarter of a mile from the point where the spur ridge left the mountain we found, nestling between knolls, a small pocket. In its center was a small, moss-rimmed pool of clear water and surrounding it were clumps of shoulder-high mountain hemlock, the highest trees on the mountain. An ideal spot for our camp.

I collected dry wood for our cooking fire and cut "mountain feathers" for our bed—tips of the hemlock boughs, which I overlapped with the cut ends on the ground to make a springy mattress a foot thick. I gathered dry moss and spread a thick covering over the boughs, spread out the calico, and covered it

with a thin layer of moss with fanlike fronds of hemlock to hold it together. The cloth was not for warmth, it was to keep our moss blanket in place and keep crawly things from going down Ruth's neck.

When the mountain face was completely in shadow the evening breeze began blowing down the hill. Only then did we start our fire, so the smoke would not go up into the hunting ground.

We found fresh goat tracks near our camp site so I concluded there must be quite a herd, else they would not be feeding so low on the mountain in warm weather. But from the top of the knoll a few yards above our camp we had a clear view of the whole face of the mountain, and although one of us had kept watch on the goat pastures, we had not seen a goat anywhere. After supper we set out to investigate. We found more goat tracks on our ridge, but over on the mountain we found fresh tracks of a pack of wolves. So that was it. The wolves were hunting the customary feeding grounds of the goats, so the goats had retreated to the brushy slope lower down. What kind of cliff did they know down there, we wondered, for safe refuge from the wolves? We came back and found their tracks leading down a well-used trail to some exceedingly steep ground.

Back at camp, we kicked off our boots and slid under the cloth, being careful not to disturb our moss blanket. Our bed of boughs was as soft as a spring mattress; our blanket, even warmer than an eiderdown robe. We had to scrape off some moss before we could sleep.

In the night I was awakened by the screaming of wind over the tops of the knolls. The clouds were scurrying past so close I could have poked a hole in them with a long stick. This, I thought, was the end of our hunt. You can't see a white mountain goat in a fog, and neither would I lead Ruth down over the brink of an unknown cliff. Down in our little pocket we were sheltered, and Ruth was sleeping so soundly I didn't waken her to break the sad tidings. Even in a thick fog we could find our way back as we had come, so I snuggled down and was soon fast asleep again.

Next time I opened my eyes the clouds were gone, the wind was gone, and the sun was just tinting the peaks with rose. It was a new day, a new hunting season, and the goats were only a short

distance below us — a rare if not new situation. Usually the goats are above the hunters.

Hoping to find them while they were still feeding, we pulled on our boots and struck out. Breakfast could wait. Carefully stalking the knolls but seeing nothing, we followed the trail down the hill into the timber. Soon we saw open space ahead through the trees, then found ourselves on the brink of a sheer cliff with nothing but atmosphere out in front. The goat trail disappeared over the rim. Any goats below would be watching that trail, so we followed the rim, searching for a place where we could look down.

Coming to a projection with trees growing on its edge, I eased myself down onto it and was able to look several hundred feet down a smooth overhanging wall. Almost directly below, on a dry shelf beneath the overhang, a goat lay in its bed, chewing its cud.

Ruth came down at my motion and took my place. With an arm around a tree, she leaned out and looked down. Her smile was radiant as she looked back and nodded. I handed her the rifle. Quietly she slipped a cartridge into the barrel, put the gun to her shoulder, and looked down. Then she turned back to me. "I can't do it," she whispered. "I just can't."

"Yes, you can," I encouraged her. "Try it again. I'll help you."

I slid down behind her, dug my heels solidly against the roots of the trees, and took a firm grip on the slack at the waistband of her trousers. Again, with the gun at her shoulder, Ruth leaned out, and out, and out. I hadn't realized she'd need to get out so far to get the goat in her sights. But my firm grip gave her confidence. The gun roared.

"I got him!" she cried joyously. Then, "He's getting up. Oh, he's running! He's getting away!"

"Shoot!" I ordered. "Shoot!"

She bolted another cartridge and fired again. "Oh, I missed him!" she wailed.

"Keep shooting!" I yelled, tightening my grip to reassure her.

She swung with the running goat and fired. I couldn't see below the cliff, so knew what was going on only by her reactions. She stood watching with no move toward reloading, then backed away from the brink of the cliff, sat down heavily, and encircled a tree with her arm. "I got him," she said weakly. "He's lying against a log, away down the hill."

A bundle of white lay fifty yards below the foot of the cliff. I watched for some time but it did not move.

We went back to camp for a delayed breakfast, then to the cliff to find a way down. First we started down the goat trail, but backed out when we came to a place where the goats jumped



Ruth posed for pictures.



from one narrow ledge to the next. There was nothing to hold onto.

At last we found a place too steep even for a goat trail, but with trees and bushes all the way to the bottom of the cliff. There we went down, our faces to the wall. I went first and guided Ruth's feet to crevices and toe holds. At last we reached the bottom.

When we dressed out the goat we could find only one place where it had been hit. The left horn was missing and a furrow across the skull showed where a bullet had dislodged it. I couldn't find another mark anywhere. Climbing up to the ledge, I found the goat's bed and the marks where it had scrambled to its feet. Tracking it to the point where it had started to roll, I looked around until I found the horn, thirty feet away. The first shot had hit the horn two inches above the skull, stunning the animal for the moment. The last shot had struck just two inches lower, knocking the horn clear off and killing the goat.

Freak shots, yes, but the most remarkable shooting I ever saw considering the position. Try it sometime—standing at a dizzy height and shooting straight down with a high-powered rifle. You'll know why the audience on the cannery dock didn't care to compete with Ruth at marksmanship.

Now all we had to do was get Ruth's trophy to the boat and in to town before anyone else brought in a goat. We couldn't possibly get it up over the cliff. We'd have to take it the long way, around the end of the spur ridge. It was a medium-sized adult with eight-and-one-half-inch horns. But we'd just had a big breakfast, the morning was cool and our enthusiasm was running high.

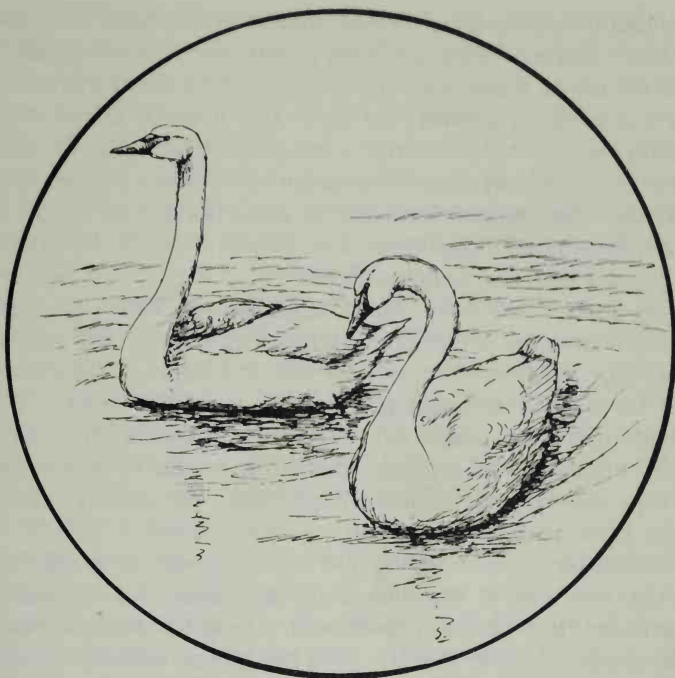
At first the ground was steep and covered with dry needles from the trees, so we could slide the goat along with little effort. Before long we were packing it across gullies and soft ground, over brush patches and fallen trees. The sun, as it climbed, beat down more fiercely than it had the day before, and down in the brush there wasn't a breath of wind to keep the clouds of flies and mosquitoes away.

At noon we built a fire beside a clear-water stream and cooked a hearty meal. As the day wore on, our stops became more frequent and longer. I began to think we'd bitten off more than we could chew, that we might have to butcher the goat and leave part behind, or cache it whole and come back the next day, trusting to luck that no bear would find it.

But it was Ruth's first goat and she wanted it, all of it. She declared she'd stay with it and get it out, even if she had to eat it down to her size. So we kept on, each lift heavier than the last, each yard longer, and when we stumbled and fell we were more and more reluctant to get up. At six in the evening, still a long way from the beach, we cooked another meal and had a good rest. The sun went down, and the gloom was thickening under the trees when we saw an opening ahead and heard the lapping of waves. We were a long way from the boat when at last we broke through to the beach. Ruth stood guard and rested while I went after the boat. Long after dark we got back to the launch, tired but happy. We had accomplished our purpose and tomorrow we could rest.

Ruth's goat was the first entered in the contest. It was displayed for all to see, and the crowds gathered to look, admire, marvel at the single bullet mark in the head, and marvel more when they read, "Killed by MRS. RUTH JACKSON." I was so proud of my wife, I wanted to tell them all about that overhanging cliff, how the goat lay at the base of it, feeling secure, and how Ruth, hundreds of feet above, leaned out to make the kill.

In all the years the Tongass Trading Company ran a hunting contest, my wife, Mrs. Ruth Jackson, was the only woman who ever entered a mountain goat.



## Chapter 17

For several years Ruth and I had been laying aside our trapping money for a travel fund. I hadn't been back to my old home since our marriage, and Ruth never had been to California. With the San Francisco World's Fair scheduled for 1939, we thought that a most opportune time to go.

Although we trapped every winter, our fund grew slowly because of low fur prices and adverse weather conditions on the trap line, but with renewed prosperity there came a renewed demand for furs and prices soared. When a beaver season was announced for the spring of '39 and the price was predicted to go to fifty dollars a pelt, we were highly elated. On our trout-fishing trips we'd noted a satisfactory growth in the beaver colonies and felt we could easily get our limits, ten beaver apiece at fifty dollars a pelt. We'd have a travel stake.

We had finished the last beaver season at our lakes far back in the hills. Beaver traps are heavy and ours were where we expected to use them next, so we had cached them there. Now, with our supplies aboard, we went out a week ahead of the opening date to hold down the ground. There was no official method of assigning a particular piece of trapping ground to any individual. The trappers worked that out among themselves, and the old-timers had a gentlemen's agreement that the first one on the ground had the trapping rights.

Consequently we were much disappointed when we found another boat at our anchorage, a tent set up ashore, and two men there who said they were out for beaver trapping. They'd been there for a week and had trails cut back to the lakes.

I had trails back there too. During my years of beaver and marten trapping I had cruised out the best routes to all the lakes, but they were my own private trails and I defied any man, no matter how good a woodsman, to follow them.

Years earlier I was trapping with Joe LeGault on Rudd River. Joe had one side of the river and I the other. On his trails he blazed every tree he could reach with a long-handled ax, making spots you could see in the dark. One day he had occasion to come back in on my side. When I asked whether he had followed my trail, he snorted, "Blazes the size of a two-bit piece every quarter of a mile. I don't call that a blazed trail."

I followed the game trails, and when the bear and the deer wished to go in one direction and I in another, I cut through the woods to another trail going my way. My private blazes marked the places where I left the game trails. I had conspicuous blazes there too, deliberately placed to mislead anyone I didn't want following my trails. Of course I always warned Ruth, so she wouldn't end up spending the night in some devil's club thicket if she tried to follow my trail home.

When I told the two trappers that my traps were back at the lakes, they suggested we divide the ground. I didn't think there were enough beaver for the four of us, so I snowshoed in and lifted my cache of traps, and we moved on to find a new location.

It was nearly the first of April, yet it was surprisingly wintery back in the inlets. The snow was still deep in the woods and in some lakes the beaver were still locked fast beneath the ice. We went from place to place without finding enough beaver sign to

make setting a trap worthwhile, and we were growing discouraged by the time we went into Spacious Bay. A freshet had cut most of the ice there and flooded the lake, taking the snow off the low banks. Fresh beaver cuttings indicated that we could get one limit right there, so we stayed. In a sheltered slough at the head of the bay there was a sturdy boat cradle, into which the *Alton* fitted nicely. With the launch safely moored there and a plank from the deck to the bank so we could walk ashore, our trapping headquarters were ready.

Next we lined the skiff up the creek to the lake and, without stepping ashore and disturbing the beaver, hunted up the best slides in which to set our traps. Fresh cuttings were everywhere. At one place the beaver had a regular logging operation, mowing down a thicket of wild crabapple. All along the creek banks and around the lake they were digging for the sprouts of new grass. We were ready, with our skiff and traps at the mouth of the lake, for opening date.

It had been a severe winter with deep snow, and hundreds of deer were congregated along the beaches. On our way out we had stopped in Moser Bay to visit Mr. and Mrs. Art Schwahn, who always had a few pet deer. They'd been feeding others through the winter, and now they had a dozen hanging around their kitchen door. Among them were several fawns. Ruth practiced imitating the call they make when separated from their mothers, until she could really talk deer talk.

Now she had a lot of fun using the call on the wild deer. When we'd come across deer on the beach they would head for the woods, white flags erect. Ruth would give a fawn call. A doe would stop, and more calls would bring her back, head up, big ears canted forward, nostrils testing the air. Then she would get suspicious and run, only to have Ruth stop her with another call and bring her back again, sometimes within a few feet of us.

Only when the snow began melting did we realize what a hard winter it had been on the deer. At the end of March we'd found more than five feet of snow on the level, packed so hard we could easily walk on it. We could only guess how deep it had been when it was loose and fluffy, before it started to settle and pack.

As the snow melted we began finding the carcasses of deer, dead from starvation and cold. Without going out of our way to hunt for them we found more than 120 dead

deer, of which only eight were wolf kills. This situation was rough for Ruth. With so many dead deer around, she refused to drink from any of the streams no matter how thirsty she got. But it was a bonanza for the bear. When they finally came out of hibernation they didn't need to forage for food; it was handy and plentiful. Feasting on winter-killed deer, unfortunately, leads some bear into becoming deer-killers.

The flat, boulder-strewn beaches had collected scores of drift logs which, over the years, the waves had pounded and ground against the rocks and marine life had eaten the soft wood, until only the hard, tough knots were left. Too heavy to float away and too dense to be penetrated by water, these knots are excellent fuel, almost as good as coal. At low tide we collected knots by the sackful and soon had fuel enough for the whole trapping season.

At last came the opening day and we went around the lake with the boat, setting our traps. We found an abundance of beaver cuttings drifting down from the big creek which enters the lake on the farther side, so next morning Ruth ferried me across the lake, then tended the traps while I went up the creek with more traps. I found beaver working all along the creek, and when I returned in the afternoon I found Ruth beside a good fire, working busily at a beaver pelt. Three more, already skinned out, lay nearby.

Skinning is cold on the hands in early spring, with ice and snow still around, and it takes a long time to skin a beaver clean. Often when we were back in the woods we didn't have much time for skinning if we were to get out before dark. Nor could we always carry beaver home—a big one weighs forty pounds or more. So we roughed them out in a hurry and took the fat off at home, where it was warm and we had more time.

It was a beautiful spring, with warm, sunny days. The snow went fast and as the ground bared along the beaches and stream banks, the grass came up so fast you could almost see it grow. Summer birds arrived from the south and the hills echoed with the boom of the hooters. For once Ruth was not tempted to go after them. She was too busy.

As I caught the beaver along the creek I went farther and farther back. With my snowshoes strapped onto my back I would wade up the creek tending my traps, then strap on my snowshoes and come home across the wide snow fields on the open tundra. Snowshoeing in hip boots is tiresome, but it was easier than





Ruth with a fifty-five-pound beaver.

floundering through the snowbanks, and much shorter than following the winding course of the creek. At that, I'd be a full day on the line and I'd get home fairly well tired out.

Ruth's trapping at the lake had slowed down too. One morning she told me she had some pelts to finish, then was going to investigate a creek she had found, hoping it would lead her to a new beaver lake. She told me the route she would take, an easy trip.

I had an especially long trip that day, and a couple of beaver to skin, and then I had to find new places to set those traps. I was miles in from the beach before I found another pool where the beaver were working, and by the time I got the traps set I had to hurry to get home before dark.

The shadows were gathering by the time I got to the beach, and my legs ached from the long snowshoe trip without a rest stop. I looked for a welcome light on the boat. There was no light, no smoke coming from the chimney. Apprehensive, I hurried aboard. Ruth was not there. The stove was cold and she had done no kitchen work since breakfast. The guns were all there but her boots, hiking clothes and trapping outfit were gone. She had left as she planned, and was still gone.

I called, and listened. No answer. I took my rifle and hurried back onto the open tundra, the most direct route for her return. Out in the open, I fired a shot, then strained my ears for an answer. There was none. No use to shout. She'd know I was firing signal shots, if she heard them, and if she didn't, she couldn't hear my call.

Half a mile farther on was an open knoll. I hurried toward it. The snow was gone here and the moss was soft, springy and soggy. My boots felt heavy as lead and I could hardly put one before the other. Up the knoll at last, I fired again and listened. All was silent. Now I was thoroughly alarmed. It was too dark now to try to track her, too dark under the trees even to see her.

Away ahead was a ridge that dominated all the tundra and the valley of the creek Ruth had planned to follow. I went toward the ridge as fast as my weary legs would take me. Many a person had gone for a walk in Alaska, never to be seen again. I thought of all the things that could befall her. Lost? A leg broken? Wolves? We had seen lots of wolf signs. Grizzlies? Trapped in a pool, like that one in Bakewell Creek?

Crossing a timbered gulley, with brush clawing my face, I realized how dark it was. My breath came in gasps as I climbed the steep slope of the ridge. As soon as I reached the top I fired another shot. Silence. Only the distant murmur of the creek. No use going farther, into the thick forest beyond the ridge.

I stood looking at the dark, silent forest that stretched back into the wilderness until it was lost among the rugged peaks. Much as I always had loved and felt at home in the forest, this one now seemed unfriendly, even menacing.

Then, from somewhere behind me and a long way off, there came the crack of a rifle shot. I whirled, fired, listened. Another distant shot. It came from the boat. Ruth was home! No

following shots to indicate distress, so she was answering my signal. She was safe. My shaking legs buckled. I sat down hard and fumbled for my pipe.

Ruth had been engrossed in working with the pelts, taking the cured ones off the boards and stretching on the fresh ones. When the boards were all filled and set out to dry, she was eager to get back to the creek. She had gone without looking at the clock, and was far back up the valley, following the creek and seeking places to set the last of her traps, when she noticed it was getting dark. She had worked longer with the pelts than she had supposed. Starting home, she was afraid of losing her way if she tried to cross the big tundra, so she cut straight down to the beach. It was farther, but the beach was easier to follow in the dark.

She'd heard all my shots and called in answer, but was too far away for me to hear her voice. She knew I was searching for her, and as my shots were getting farther and farther away, she would have to hurry. Coming to the smooth beach, she had run all the way home to get the gun and fire the shot that turned me back.

Maybe it was because we were in unfamiliar country, or maybe because of my weariness, but that was the worst scare Ruth gave me in all the hundreds of times she roamed the wilderness trails alone.

The way the beaver were jumping into the traps, we were just getting into full swing when we had our first limit, and taking care of the pelts was keeping us both working far into the night. We always prided ourselves on doing a first class job with our fur. It took a lot of time to flesh those beaver pelts and stretch them as nearly round as we could, using ten to twelve dozen nails to each pelt.

I've eaten a lot of beaver meat and enjoyed it, back in the wilderness where food was scarce and we did our cooking over a camp fire. Ruth was always wanting to try a beaver cooked at home, where she had an oven and everything to work with. She wouldn't eat one that had drowned in a trap, but the day she found one alive in a trap, she brought the meat home.

Nicely roasted, it looked and smelled delicious. I'm sure it would have tasted delicious too, at any other time, but we'd been working with beaver day and night. Our hands and our clothes smelled of beaver grease, and the air in the galley was heavy with the odor of the dried hides. We each took a bite of the beaver

roast, said it was good, then threw the rest out the porthole. One can stomach only so much beaver grease.

One day when I came back from the creek, I looked out onto the lake and saw a pair of swans. They swam around a point of timber, into a cove where the winter's ice was just breaking up. Walking quietly through the woods, I peeked out onto the cove and saw it dotted with floating ice. Two of the icebergs were directly in front of me, but the swans were gone.

I stepped out to the edge of the water. The two bergs up-ended and two long, graceful necks stretched out into the air. They were so close I could have tossed a bouquet to them. They looked me over uncertainly, talked in low, throaty tones, then swam out onto the lake.

When we had fifteen beaver we began taking up our traps, leaving only a few where the big ones were working. We judged the size of the beaver by examining the cutting and noting the width of their cutting teeth. One big beaver was worth three small ones.

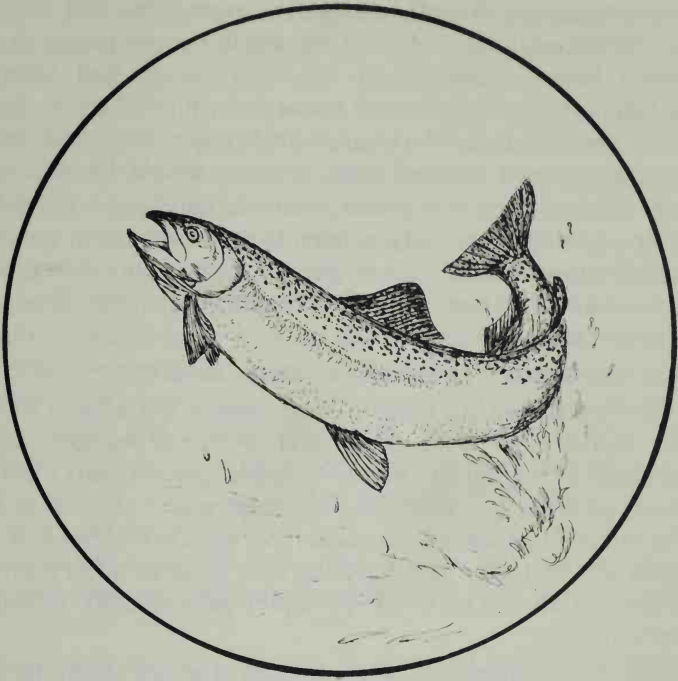
On my last trip up the creek I had a fine big beaver, for a total of eighteen. Ruth had traps where she knew big ones were working, so I took up the last of mine. When she came home she had a load of traps and a wide smile. Reaching into her pack, she pulled out two fine, big pelts. We had our two limits—twenty fine, dark beaver pelts—and we'd been trapping only eight days.

Ketchikan was full of fur buyers and competition among them was keen. When a buyer offered us sixty-five dollars each for our pelts, we sold. Now we had our travel stake, substantially bigger than we'd dared hope, so we went out for the usual summer's work.

We returned to catch a southbound boat in mid-October so we could see the San Francisco fair before it closed. We also visited the old ranch and together we roamed the hills that had been my boyhood playground. There I made a shocking discovery about my wife.

Ruth, who loved to wander the wilderness trails alone, and who crawled without hesitation through brush where the bears were so near she could smell them, refused to enter a pasture if there was a cow in it.

"I know what a bear will do," she explained, "but a cow might bite."



## Chapter 18

It was good to be home again, that next spring, taking the round stuff out of the woods.

We stayed out a long while, until good traveling weather and large empty spaces in our storage lockers indicated a trip to town. There we learned Ruth's sister, Kate, would be aboard the next boat from the westward, bound for Seattle and medical attention.

We waited to see her. She seemed the same happy, high-spirited girl she had always been, and in maturity—she was now twenty-six—she was even more beautiful. As her boat pulled away she stood at the rail, waving a gay goodbye.

We worked up near Wrangell that summer and didn't get back to Ketchikan until the end of the season. Only then did we learn our Kate never would come back. She had died in September.

\* \* \*

I think it was Cy Wykoff, the forest ranger, who first told me about Reflection Lake, secluded among the snow peaks of the mainland back of Bell Island. Cy told me he had taken a trout-fishing party in there and come out with 400 trout. There were no fresh-water fishing regulations in those days, and such a performance could be duplicated at many of our lakes.

Later I visited Dave Rutherford, who was handlogging in Bailey Bay. He and his partner had just been to Reflection Lake, and they talked about mammoth trout by the hundreds—trout that ran off with every lure they had, stripped off every inch of their lines, and took them too.

"Just like schools of humpies!" Dave declared.

In 1941 we shifted our logging operations to the vicinity of Bell Island. Bell Arm, with its deep water, sheltered harbors, and a good stand of fine quality timber on steep ground, was ideal for my type of logging. Its added advantage was nearness to Bell Island Hot Springs, where we could have weekly mail service, get supplies and visit with friends. It was also close to good hunting, fishing and trapping grounds we hadn't yet explored, including Reflection Lake.

It wasn't long before we went up to try that wonderful fishing, and we went back many times. We never found it as spectacular as the tales about it, but we could count on catching all the cutthroats we wanted.

The Forest Service trail started at the head of Short Bay and followed the creek, winding through dense spruce and hemlock. Where whitewater rapids come tumbling out of the canyon, it crossed on a footlog. We lingered there for a brief rest before tackling the switchbacks up a steep, wooded knoll. At the top the trail breaks out onto open tundra which looks more like cattle range than fishing ground.

Forty minutes from the beach, if you don't lose your way on the tundra, you come to a slough-like stretch of dead water. Here the creek, bypassed by the trail, is resting for its tumultuous trip down the canyon. Follow the slough through a patch of brush and you come at last to the lake, stretching back into the craggy peaks.

In years of deep snow, avalanches have swept great swaths of timber down the slopes and into the lake, to drift down and form a logjam 300 feet wide and solid as a bridge across the outlet. This



is where you fish, and if you hook into a big one that tangles on a submerged log, this is where you lose your gear.

Above the logjam the lake widens to half a mile, then disappears behind a precipitous slope. Ruth and I often gazed across the lovely stretch of water and wondered how far it went, what was at the other end, how big the trout were up there. But with no boat, we could only wonder.

During the summer of '43, as my stint toward the war effort, I was working long hours a day, seven days a week. Along in August Ruth got the notion that a day or two of relaxation would make me easier to live with, so she started talking trout fishing.

One evening while I was picturing mentally the holds I would take with the logging jacks in the morning, Ruth was doing the supper dishes and chattering as usual. Suddenly her words took my mind away from the big spruce log that had clung obstinately to the face of the mountain for the past three days.

"What was that?" I asked.

"You're still logging and haven't heard a word!" she scolded. "I said this warm, dry weather would be good for a trip to the head of Reflection Lake."

"It certainly would," I agreed. A cool spot beside a snowbank sounded mighty good after all the sweat the past three days. "But how would we get there?"

"Remember that old dugout canoe the Forest Service trail crew found? They said it was in good shape except for one big season crack. We could easily patch that and . . ."

Hmm. Explore the head of Reflection Lake. In an old Indian dugout. Ruth knew I couldn't resist that challenge. I didn't hear the rest of what she said and I wasn't logging either, I was starting the engine. Jimmy and Mabel Baker were living in their wanigan at the head of Short Bay. They'd keep an eye on the *Alton* while we were gone. Ruth made up our packs as we traveled.

We were always like that. One would suggest going somewhere, and there'd be a race to see who could get out the door first. I think we'd have called off the trip rather than plan all the details. This time, when I finished supper I was planning how I was going to get that tree to the water in the morning. Before dark I was telling Jim Becker to expect us back when he saw us coming, and next morning, with a back pack apiece, we met the sunshine at the top of the hill above the switchbacks.

On our last trip to the lake we had found the barren tundra dreary, so to make it more interesting to future parties of cheechakos, we had fixed up a cardboard replica of a mountain goat, tacked it to a framework of stakes, and set it up on the top of a barren knoll across a wide swale. Painted white, with black nose, eyes and horns, it looked so realistic from the trail that I almost wanted to take a shot at it.

This morning it looked a bit dilapidated. We lowered our packs, went over to investigate, and were well pleased with our handiwork when we found it riddled with bullet holes. Our packs seemed lighter as we went on our way, chuckling. This was starting out to be a good day.

Once we put a tarpaper black bear on the Yes Bay trail, and next time we went up there it was gone. Some fellow had shot it up, then packed it off and cached it under a log.

We found the canoe in the expected place and set to work patching and caulking. It was narrow and tippy but seaworthy enough for our purpose, so we loaded our duffel and set out.

By the time we'd paddled far enough to see the head of the lake we were wishing we'd eaten a bigger breakfast, so we went ashore where a clear-water brooklet came burbling down from the snowbanks, and boiled the billy can. We lingered over our lunch, enjoying the view of the lake with its reflections of the snow-mantled peaks.

A light breeze sprang up. It spoiled the reflections but worked to our advantage, as we cut a wide, leafy frond of Sitka alder and used it as a sail. Apprehensive about sailing such an unstable craft, we tied the gun and camera to the seats and held our makeshift sail in our hands so we could drop it quickly if necessary. But the breeze held and we sailed the rest of the way, stopping frequently to stretch our legs and rest our arms. Ashore, we would look for signs of game—deer and bear trails, tracks of mink and otter, beaver, wolves—and break rocks, looking for traces of mineral. On one of the slides we found a species of wild flower new to us. On our way back we would collect one to take home and identify.

It was late afternoon when we reached the head of the lake and landed at the mouth of a creek, where there was a wide sand bar I wanted to investigate. As I suspected, we were not the only ones there. Leading across the bar was the largest set of grizzly tracks I

had seen in a long time. I knelt to span them. A full ten inches wide.

Meanwhile Ruth investigated a patch of salmonberries along the creek, and called me to come and help her pick some of the big, ripe berries for our supper. Going from bush to bush, I wandered up a side gulley. Presently Ruth came over and casually asked where the gun was.

"Oh, I left it on that big log down by the beach," I answered, and went on picking berries.

She came over and peeked at the berries in my hat. "Oh, you have a nice lot," she said. "We couldn't eat any more for supper, and we can get fresh ones when we want them."

Strange she wants to quit so soon, I thought, but it was time to look for a camping spot so I followed her back to the canoe. Afterward she told me she had caught the strong smell of a bear. When she could smell a bear on a dry evening like that, it had to be too close.

Over on the left corner we found an ideal place to camp. Back of a small sand beach stood two big spruce trees with thick, spreading branches under which the ground was thoroughly dry, and beside them was a gentle slope carpeted with thick green moss and sprinkled with clumps of ferns. We couldn't have found a prettier place, but I wanted to scout around before making camp.

Fifty feet up the slope I came upon a regular highway of a bear trail. Ruth was packing things up from the canoe when I called her. Together we examined the trail, two feet wide, worn deep into the solid ground. I looked at a freshly broken leaf just beginning to wilt under the hot afternoon sun, up and down the brush-free trail with not a dry twig to give a warning snap, down the slope with its padding of moss that would silence any footsteps, and on down about three jumps to the spot where we planned to make our bed. A chill ran down my spine.

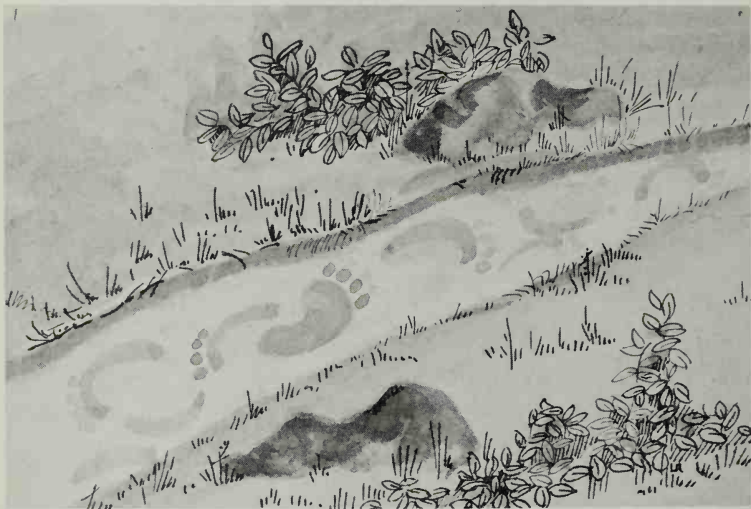
"I'm getting out of here!" Ruth declared, but she didn't beat me back to the canoe.

We paddled to the right side of the lake, then along the shore. It was steep and rocky until we came to the flat ground at the head. There, at the high-water level above a smooth sand beach, was a big log that would make a fine backlog for our fire. Behind it was a

thick patch of vine alder, but the ground was flat and we could easily clear a spot for our bed.

First, though, I looked for signs of bear. There were no tracks on the beach, and back in the woods I found no trails. This would do nicely. We cleared the spot for our bed, then I climbed a spruce tree and stripped the wide pads of green moss from the branches until we had a mattress a foot thick.

Back in the woods, searching for boughs to put under the moss, I came across a well used bear trail apparently heading straight for our camp. Strange I had not seen it. I followed it and found that it came out under some drooping branches, then along the top of the big log. We were actually using a bear trail as a backlog for our campfire!



Too late now to go back down the lake and make a new camp. We'd have to make the best of it. Luckily there was a good supply of driftwood scattered along the beach. The best insurance against molestation is a good fire. I started collecting dry wood, and by the time Ruth had supper ready, my woodpile was shoulder-high. Enough for a week, I thought.

While we were eating we heard a sudden, loud snap of a stick on the trail. I moved the gun within easy reach and watched the

drooping branches under which the trail emerged. Minutes later we heard more snapping of twigs behind camp and away from the trail, but we saw and heard no more. Whatever it was, it preferred circling through the woods to coming down and claiming its right of way.

The sun left the valley but still bathed the peaks in a golden glow. The afternoon breeze died, leaving the surface of the lake like a mirror again, reflecting the beaches and trees, the mountains and the snowbanks.

It was eight o'clock when I finally said, "Do you realize we've had trout jumping around us all day and we haven't wet a line?"

We paddled over to the mouth of the creek. The lake was so low we could walk out onto the long sand bar until it dropped into deep water. There we could see the trout—small ones rising to the creek current, large ones keeping to the depths. I cast a spinner out into the eddy and let it sink. A whole school charged it as I started to pull in line. A small one got itself firmly hooked and put up a game battle, while much larger ones darted back and forth to see what all the excitement was about. When I finally beached the little fellow, I was surprised to find it a plump 15-incher. The clear water was deeper than it looked.

Now it was Ruth's turn. On her first cast she hooked a duplicate of mine. Two were all we wanted for breakfast.

Across the lake, below the camp site of our first choice, the steep mountainside was banded with vertical stripes of varying width where snowslides had roared down from the peaks, sweeping the timber into the lake. These slide paths were now overgrown with thick salmonberry bushes. We decided to paddle over and pick some berries for our evening mug-up. It was farther, of course, than the berry patch at the creek, but the shadows were deep in the heavy timber now and—well, we didn't want to deprive the bears.

Those bushes were fairly loaded with big, luscious golden berries. They were head-high bushes, so thick that our range of vision was cut to a few feet as we worked into the patch. Tiny rivulets, coursing down from the melting snow, rattled noisily, shutting out all other sound. Soon we made another discovery—the whole berry patch was crisscrossed with fresh bear trails. All the grizzlies from far and wide apparently congregated there to feast on the crop.

Cautiously we backed out to the water edge of the patch, snatching a berry here, another there, and left. Right in the thick of grizzly feeding ground, in brush so thick you couldn't see a bear until you were close enough to rub noses with him—a fine place to be prowling at nine-thirty in the evening.

Back at camp, we had our mug-up and watched the slides and beaches until dark, but saw no sign of wildlife except the trout leaping in the lake and the bats chasing the flying sparks above our campfire. Not having actually seen a single bear, we went to bed and I was soon fast asleep.

Some time later I was wakened by the crackling of the fire. There sat Ruth, her back to a blazing fire, intently watching out into the pitch darkness beyond the circle of the firelight. She said she hadn't yet gone to sleep when she heard a bear splashing in the shallow water at the mouth of the creek, and he was now coming along the beach toward us. We listened intently for some time. Hearing nothing, I went back to sleep, but not for long.

"That bear is right in here," Ruth whispered as she shook me. She pointed into the thick alder brush just back of our bed.

We threw on more dry wood and soon had a big, bright blaze. There was a rustling close by, in the thicket Ruth had indicated. We watched again until, convinced that the bear had left, I went back to sleep. Ruth, protesting that she wasn't sleepy, sat up and kept the fire going.

Next I woke to the rattle of dishes. The sun was shining halfway down the mountain and Ruth was getting breakfast. Of the big pile of wood I'd gathered, not a stick was left. Ruth hadn't slept a wink, she'd fed the fire all night.

After breakfast we started over to fish at the mouth of the creek, Ruth paddling and I walking. There in the sand I found the tracks of our midnight visitor, grizzly tracks not there the evening before. They went within forty yards of our camp, then turned up into the alder patch. It wasn't the big one with the ten-inch-wide pads, but it was a trophy-size grizzly.

I was backtracking the bear when Ruth shouted. Trolling as she paddled, she had hooked a trout and was getting more action than she could handle easily from the dugout. The fish went deep, the rod bent double and the reel screamed. Then the line slacked and Ruth reeled frantically before the next wild rush, first on one side, then the other.



Eventually the fish tired. Paddling with one hand, holding the rod with the other, she worked slowly toward the beach. A wide border of pond lilies gave her more trouble. The trout would dash for the shelter of a broad leaf and take a turn of the line around the stem. Ruth would unwind the line and take another stroke or two, then stop to unwind her line again. I waded out to meet her, and when at last I could reach the line I led in a plump eighteen-inch cutthroat.

Ruth paddled out, dropped her line again, and almost instantly hooked another trout. This one, a surface fighter, made wild runs and flying leaps, while Ruth frantically let out line, cranked it in, and swung the rod back and forth across the nose of the rolling

The trout were surface fighters.



canoe. Twice she shipped water and we thought Ruth was about to go swimming.

Such fast action tired this fish more quickly, but I think it snared half the leaves in the lily patch as Ruth brought it toward the beach. Again I waded out and led the fish in—a twenty-three-incher, the largest cutthroat Ruth ever caught and by far the most difficult to land.

We didn't want any more fish, and the Beckers had given us strict orders not to bring them any.

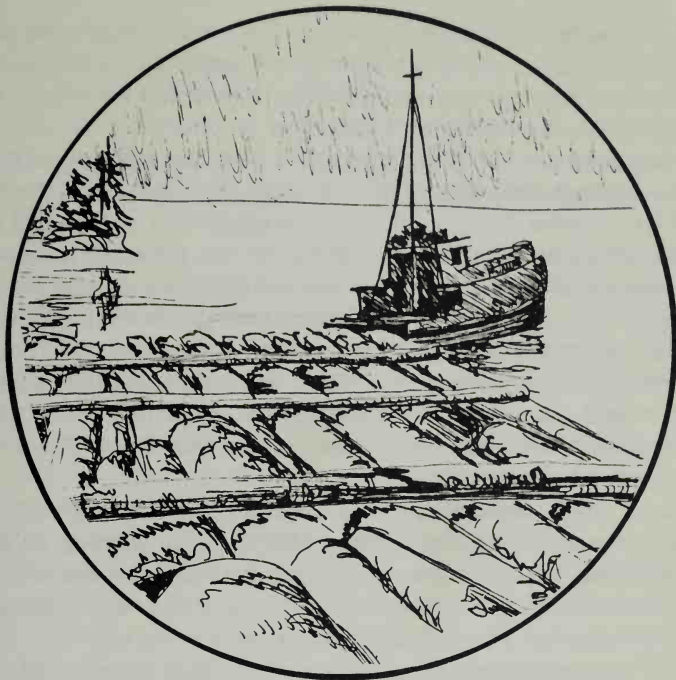
Ruth refused to camp another night at the head of the lake or anywhere near it, so we broke camp and headed for home. Ruth tried to get a little sleep at our lunch stop halfway down the lake, but the deer flies were so bad she gave it up. After two long, strenuous days and a sleepless night her feet were really dragging by the time we reached salt water.

As we neared the Beckers' wanigan the door flew open and Mabel called, "I've been watching for you and supper's ready."

No wonder we love our friends!

"How was the fishing trip?" Jim and Mabel asked.

"Best one yet," I answered honestly, "and I caught only one fish."



## Chapter 19

In the summer of 1944 we went to Claude Point for the spruce to fill a contract.

Claude Point is a large, wooded knoll projecting into Behm Canal near the tip of Revilla Island, fifty miles north of Ketchikan. A low, grass-covered spit connects the point to the island, making a sheltered harbor on either side. A place of beauty in summer, with calm, sheltered water, it is wild and isolated in winter when the north gales come screaming down from the Unuk River valley.

It is also a place of mystery.

In 1919 Ruth's brother, Jud Johnstone, found the skull of a huge grizzly in the harbor there. The strange thing about it was that no grizzlies ever were known to be on Revilla Island. Jud later sold the skull to the Smithsonian Institution. Near the skull was the skeleton of a man finally identified as one who had been lost on the Chickamin River, more than thirty miles away.

Shortly after we moved to Claude Point I found, on the west end of the spit, the charred foundation timbers of a house that had burned down many years before. No Indian illahee, it was unmistakably a white man's house.

There were still old-time prospectors and trappers around then, men who had been acquainted with the area ever since the first white men came, but not one of these old-timers nor anyone else could tell me anything about the house, nor about anyone who ever lived at Claude Point. This was unusual too, as in a frontier country where everyone knows everyone for a hundred miles around, someone always remembers that it was Joe, or John, or Charlie, who prospected or trapped at some particular place.

Ruth and I never did find the logical explanation for those mysteries at Claude Point, and while we were there we encountered another one.

Back in 1921 Jack McKay was operating the boat *Salmon Bay* as a camp tender for the Sawyer McKay logging camp in Saks Cove. Once when he was alone on the boat on his way to Ketchikan, evening overtook him at Claude Point so he went into the north harbor to anchor for the night.

Jack had just dropped the anchor when there came a call from the outer end of the spit. While he was making the anchor line secure, he answered. Just as he straightened up he heard a second call.

"All right," he called back, and started aft. There came a third call. He looked the beach over carefully, saw no one, but replied, "I'll be right in." Still no one appeared on shore.

Jack lowered his skiff and rowed ashore. There was no one in sight. He shouted several times but got no answer. Thinking someone anchored on the other side of the spit had walked across, he landed and walked far enough that he could see the other harbor. There was no boat and no one ashore. He looked around for a camp but found none, nor did he find a human footprint, nor any sign that anyone had been there for months.

Back aboard, he watched the beach until dark and again in the morning, but saw no one and heard nothing more. On his subsequent weekly trips he watched the shore closely as he went by, but never did see a sign of a human being.

Jack McKay was an old-time woodsman, not easily confused or mystified.

About ten years later Jim Pitcher, who had not yet heard Jack McKay's story, had an almost identical experience. Cruising alone on his boat, he anchored for the night on the opposite side of the spit, heard the same three calls, rowed ashore, and found no one. He, too, thought someone was anchored in the other harbor and walked across, to find it deserted. Again there was neither camp nor footprint.

Jim Pitcher was an old sourdough prospector who would always go out of his way to help someone in trouble, and he put forth every effort to find the owner of that voice. He knew, as Jack McKay had known, that this was not prospecting nor mining country, it was not hunting nor trapping season, there were no trail crews nor timber cruisers thereabouts, and the nearest habitation was the Bell Island resort, ten miles away and across the channel. Jim even went to Bell Island to inquire, but no one knew of anyone being in the vicinity of Claude Point.

When Jim told me about the experience he said there had been no words to the call, it was "just a shout, like any Swede fisherman calling to attract your attention." He declared that in more than fifty years in the wilderness, this was the only thing he ever had encountered that he could not explain.

At the time Ruth and I were there, we knew nothing about either Pitcher's or McKay's experiences, and when I found the remains of the burned house I was only mildly curious. It soon slipped my mind and I didn't try to learn about its history until later. Claude Point to us was just another nice, quiet harbor with plenty of tall spruce trees growing along the shore, king salmon in the bay, and trout streams not far off.

We'd been there a month and the work was progressing well. Right after breakfast I'd taken my skiff and gone to work down toward Beaver Creek, but I'd be back at noon, hungry. Ruth looked at the clock and decided she'd have time to catch a salmon for dinner. She got her tackle and rowed out into the bay.

Just as she stopped to drop her lure into the water, she heard a call from the shore across the bay. That was nothing unusual, for often when I was cruising out more trees to cut, I would come out through the woods. If I was closer to her than to my skiff, I'd call her to get me.

Ruth had just turned her skiff to look for me when she heard the call again, directly in front of her. It didn't come from the beach,

it came from the steep mountainside about 200 yards back in the timber. Her heart leaped into her throat as she pictured me lying up there in the woods, hurt and needing her help. She answered that she was coming. Again the call, loud and clear. She noted the exact spot and leaned on the oars.

Abruptly she stopped, dumbfounded. From somewhere down toward Beaver Creek came the steady chopping sounds of my ax. In dismay she looked from one spot to the other. She could not see into the timber, but anyone up there could see her. She called repeatedly. No answer.

As Jack McKay and Jim Pitcher had done, she walked across the spit to look into the other harbor. It was deserted. She returned to the launch, where she watched and listened until I came home.

No, I hadn't been up there on the mountainside, we hadn't seen another boat for days, and we knew no one lived on the island within two days' hiking. We couldn't think of any reason why anyone would be there. We hurried through the meal, then rowed out into the bay to the spot where Ruth had been when she heard the call, and took a bearing. A forked-top hemlock, a dead snag, a tall spruce. Then we climbed the hill.

We searched the ground, minutely examined every game trail, looked thoroughly in every tree, round and round, circling wider and wider, until we'd searched every foot of the hillside. There was not a track, not a leaf overturned, not a sign of any living thing larger than a chickadee or a red squirrel.

We spent the whole summer there, explored every creek, and did our deer hunting there in the fall, and we didn't see or hear anything unusual again. The voice of Claude Point remained a mystery.

Friday noon was the end of my work week while I was handlogging at Claude Point, because on Friday afternoons the weekly mail and passenger boat came to the resort at Bell Island, our point of contact with civilization. It was always a gala occasion. New guests would be arriving, exuberant with anticipation. Others would be leaving with their sunburns and memories. Boating parties would congregate, neighbors would come in, there'd be fresh supplies, newspapers, letters from home.



Ruth and I, after being out by ourselves for a week, enjoyed seeing old friends. She would have a good gabfest with her chums and I'd get a pinochle game. There, too, we had an opportunity to meet people we never would have met in town — movie actors and millionaires, big business executives and national leaders. When the crowd and the mood were right, there would be a big party or a dance.

One Friday we were looking forward to the trip with more than the usual eagerness. Besides having important letters to mail, we were expecting important mail and supplies, and some friends would be there whom we wanted to visit before they returned home.

As soon as the noon meal was over I stowed the logging tools, coiled tow lines and washed down the deck, minimizing the evidence that our home was also a work boat. I looked over the logs floating in the boom, seeing that they were secure, then changed from calked boots and stagged pants to town clothes.

Meanwhile Ruth, her baking done, was busy cleaning in preparation for the company she knew we would have aboard. Perhaps there would be someone to dinner. Always there was visiting, coffee, mug-ups. Ruth's table was popular wherever we went.

While we were under way, Ruth was down prettying herself up. She got out the clothes she would wear and decided they needed pressing, so she got out her gasoline iron and pumped it up.

Down through the narrows we had a fair tide that was boosting us along at a lively clip, and as I sat at the wheel watching the trees go by, I was thinking another half hour would bring us to the Bell Island dock. The mail boat would be coming soon, and there'd be other boats. I wondered which ones, and who might be aboard. Last Friday there was a yacht from Los Angeles with a Hollywood crowd who'd been interested in my bear stories. Some of them might want to go bear hunting, with me as guide.

Suddenly I heard a scream and Ruth came flying past and out onto the deck, her clothes a mass of flames. I glanced below and saw flames around the stove from the floor nearly to the ceiling.

The fire below deck would have to wait. Grabbing my heavy wool coat, I jumped to Ruth's side and wrapped it around her, smothering the flames. Then I grabbed the fire extinguisher and rushed below. The flames had crossed the floor and were blazing

all over and under the bed. A few squirts of pyrene put out the fire on the bed, the floor and the stove, but there was still a lot of fire rolling out from under the bed.

I dropped to my knees and squirted frantically, until a lungful of pyrene fumes sent me reeling and gasping. I dashed to the door, gulped fresh air and ran back. The fire had crept out across the floor again, but I held my breath and managed to put out the flames. The mattress was still smoldering so I took it out on deck and extinguished the last of the fire.

During this melee the boat was running at full speed, with no one at the helm and no one looking to see where we were going. Finally one of us thought to shut off the power.

A leak in the iron had caused the trouble. Under pressure, as Ruth pumped it up, it had been spraying her and the room with a fine stream of gasoline. Not noticing, Ruth lit the iron. The flame set fire to the gasoline on her hand. To put it out, she wiped her hand on her gasoline-sprayed trouser leg, which was instantly afire.

When we regained enough composure to look things over we found little evidence of our near catastrophe. Besides the smell of smoke and gasoline and pyrene fumes, and a small hole burned in the mattress, the only sign was the singed tips of Ruth's curls. I got out the barber shears and, drifting with the tide in mid-channel, set up my beauty parlor on deck while the boat was airing out. With the singed tips snipped off, Ruth looked a bit lopsided, so I gave her a complete haircut.

That evening my pinochle opponents were experts and every point was hotly contested. While someone else was dealing I looked around the room. Another card game was in progress nearby, some fishermen were stretching their arms, describing the big ones that got away. There was a riotous group of young folks at the pingpong table, and a newcomer with a violin and a girl at the piano were making music. In the store, in the next room, people were getting supplies or asking for their mail.

Across the room, Ruth was sitting on a sofa between a couple of her girl friends, all three talking like magpies. She looked mighty pretty in her white blouse and her new haircut, though one side of her face did look a little rosier than the other. Feeling my gaze, she looked over and smiled. We'd missed the mail boat, but it would be back next week and we were having a wonderful evening.



## Chapter 20

Using Claude Point as a booming ground, I worked up the shore into Burroughs Bay. Each time we passed the mouth of Grant Creek we found it more fascinating. New lakes and creeks always were irresistible to us, and this one was especially alluring because it was so little known.

Originating among the snow peaks back in the mainland, it is a big stream, big enough to be called a river anywhere but in Alaska. Its deep, narrow valley is wild and rugged, totally devoid of road, trail or habitation, its only sign of human intrusion a dilapidated, abandoned Indian trapping cabin at its mouth.

Grant Creek got its name from Sixshooter Grant, an early pioneer and United States Marshal in Ketchikan who, legend says, used to sit on the bank of a lake, sixgun in hand, and shoot the trout as they leaped into the air. What he was doing around

this piece of backwoods real estate, I never learned, nor had I met anyone who had been farther up Grant Creek than he could row at high tide.

As the snow melted on the higher slopes, myriads of rivulets filled the main stream bank-full and it came charging down, white water clear to the bay. Most of the snow melted by midsummer and Grant Creek receded to a more hospitable attitude. Still it was a husky, brawling stretch of water which would be difficult to ascend, and highly dangerous to an unwary boatman.

In mid-July, after a stretch of cool, dry days, the stream looked about as negotiable as it was going to get, so, as we'd known all the time we would, we decided to go up and see what everyone was afraid of.

We'd found a deep pool half a mile upstream across the tidal flats, where the water was ten feet deep at low tide. This pool would make a good anchorage for the launch while we were away. One evening, when the weather was promising for the morrow, we went in at high tide and dropped the anchor. As the tide receded, narrowing the channel, the current became swifter and swifter until it began turning the propeller merrily, and I could swing the boat back and forth across the pool simply by rolling the steering wheel. I became apprehensive, for now the tide was so low we couldn't get out, but a long line stretched to a convenient tree held us securely.

Because of wartime shortages we'd been unable to replace our old, useless outboard motor. We would have to row and line our flat-bottomed skiff upstream. By taking advantage of the high tide, about daylight, we could save a mile of bucking the swift current. Accordingly, we got our outfit together in the evening.

When the alarm roused us from our dreams of trout streams and berry patches, a sky ablaze with stars promised a perfect day. As soon as we finished breakfast we started, to be sure of catching all the flood tide. The flooded flats were calm as a millpond, and while we rowed we watched the Northern Lights shining like beams from giant searchlights beyond the mountains ahead. Here on the flats, where the creek channel was bordered by low willows and patches of grass, it was fairly light from the starlight and the reflections of the snowfields above timberline. By the time we'd rowed across the flats the stars had paled and the gray of dawn was creeping down into the valleys, but up where the heavy

forest came down to the banks of the stream, the black shadows were a wall of gloom beneath the tall spruces.

By brisk rowing we passed the last riffle, and just as the tide started to recede we entered a long, deep pool. We could relax now, while waiting for full daylight. We rowed slowly toward the upper end of the pool, then let the current hold the boat against the top of a tree that protruded from shore. Ahead was the dancing white water of a long, swift riffle and beside it the dry gray expanse of a wide gravel bar.

Presently, up there, a black shadow detached itself from the gloom beneath the trees. At the edge of the open bar it paused so long we began to think we had just imagined it was moving. Then it moved again, ponderously but silently, out across the open gravel bar.

Against the light background the big bear was plainly visible. It looked solid black, but was it a grizzly? If it was a black we wouldn't give it a second thought, but if it was a grizzly we'd give it plenty of elbow room.

The binoculars showed us the high hump on the shoulders and the widely spaced forelegs, which always reminded me of a bowlegged cowboy in chaps. It was a grizzly, coming toward us. At the end of the bar he walked up a log and into the woods.

Soon the sun tipped the peaks with a rose glow, and full daylight came rapidly to the valley floor. After waiting long enough to be sure the bear was not coming down to take issue with us, we moved up to the swift water and began lining the skiff upstream.

The creek, slightly milky from a glacier somewhere up at its head, came down in a riffle 300 yards long, a hundred feet wide, waist deep, and swift. With the long line over my shoulder I walked the edge of the shore, pulling the boat against the swift current, while Ruth, with an oar, held it off shore and away from obstructions.

Next we came to a short pool. Above it, swift water against a brushy bank forced us to cross to the gravel bar on the opposite side. I rowed as hard as I could, yet lost some hard-earned distance before I gained the other shore.

A laborious way of getting upstream, but after negotiating each difficult stretch we could anticipate the pleasure of drifting back down on our way home. At each obstacle — submerged rock, cut-

bank, sweeper—I memorized the best approach for the return trip.

Thus we progressed farther and farther into the wilderness, tugging on the towline, taking advantage of every eddy, crossing and recrossing the stream.

As we traveled we took note of our surroundings. A clearwater side stream looked like a good place for rainbow trout. Here was a good salmonberry patch; there, a thick growth of blueberry bushes. Wherever we stopped to rest we examined every likely piece of quartz for mineral. We scrutinized every sand bar for tracks, and we found lots of them, mostly big. Signs of grizzlies were everywhere. On one big, open sand bar, countless tracks showed that a pack of wolves had been feeding on scraps of salmon left by the bears.

Upon coming around a bend two miles back, we saw a bear out on an open bar, feeding on something. "Black," I said, but trained the glasses on it out of habit. "No, not a black," I corrected myself, and handed the glasses to Ruth. He looked black in the shadow, but through the glasses we could see he was dark brown and the guard hair along his back was tipped with silver.

He didn't look very big, but he was on our side of the river and we were following a narrow strip of beach beneath a cutbank 10 feet high. We knew the main bear trail would be along the top of the bank, and we didn't want any bear with silver-tipped guard hair looking down the back of our necks, so we crossed a wide gravel bar with a good view in all directions.

When the bear finished eating, we found how greatly we had misjudged him. He'd been lying on his belly in a small hollow, in the shadow of some tall trees. As he got up and walked out into the sunshine he grew bigger and bigger, until we realized he was by far the largest bear we had ever seen. I made haste to get the rifle from the boat and see that it was fully loaded. Then I shouted to attract his attention, and when he turned his head I waved my arms. He looked directly at us, head up and nostrils testing the air, then started ambling toward us. Again I shouted and waved my arms. He stopped, peered intently, then came on.

Knowing bears have poor vision, I started towing the boat upstream so he could recognize more easily what we were. He stopped again, watching us. We kept moving upstream. Again he came toward us, walking faster. I had Ruth move up beside me so



he could see there were two of us. Again he paused, but only for a moment.

By now he was only a hundred yards away. At that range, with us right out in the bright sunlight, he certainly must know what we were. For a bear of his size, acting as he was, he was too close to suit me. Although the river was between us, it would scarcely slow him.

Directly in his path was a deep pothole with a steep bank. He turned to go around it, still walking briskly. When he was broadside to us and headed toward the woods, I fired a shot into the gravel a few feet behind him. He showed not the slightest reaction. Not a flick of an ear, a turn of the head nor a change in stride. I'd banked on bluffing him out with the rifle shot. Now what was I to do?

Ruth, standing empty-handed beside me, thought of something. She jumped to the boat, grabbed the bucket, dumped our lunch to the ground. She threw a handful of gravel into the bucket and shook it vigorously.

The bear, having rounded the pothole, was coming straight toward us again. At the sound of Ruth's rattling he slowed perceptibly. Then he turned a little off course to sniff at a dead salmon. He sniffed a long time. Ruth kept shaking the bucket.

"Shake the hell out of it!" I encouraged her, yelling above the din. She aimed the top of the bucket toward the bear and shook harder.

The bear reached out a paw, gingerly turned the fish over, and contemplated it thoughtfully. He sniffed it again with utmost deliberation and then, not even glancing toward us, turned, walked nonchalantly across the gravel bar, and entered the woods.

He was a magnificent specimen, such as any trophy hunter would give a great deal to collect, and he certainly wasn't mad. Head up, ears erect, his actions and expressions were those of simple curiosity. He didn't know what those things were over there across the river, and he was coming to investigate. Possibly he had never run across any of our kind before. How he'd have reacted, we could not know, and his size was considerably greater than our curiosity.

He was also too proud to admit fear of anything. His feigned interest in that old dead fish gave him time to think. There he was,

out in the middle of an open bar in the bright sunlight, wishing he were somewhere else and looking for a way to make his exit without losing face. By pretending to consider and then reject the fish, he could stroll away as if for a siesta, his dignity intact.

Later, when I was guiding, I took a dude hunter in there. Although we found his huge footprints, the monster silvertip kept discreetly out of sight. Ruth and I hoped he kept on using his head, and lived to a ripe old age.

We were forced to recross the stream there, but we waited, prudently, until we were sure the big fellow hadn't changed his mind. Then we rowed over and resumed our slow way upstream, with many a glance over our shoulders.

Another hour and another mile, around one more sharp bend, we saw another big grizzly, looking for fish along a straight stretch of river. This one was light brown with heavy, dark mane that exaggerated the high hump on his shoulders. Coming to a shallow place, he made a sudden rush into the water among some startled, splashing fish. He slapped down a mighty front paw, held it there, then lowered his head and came up with a flopping 15-pound dog salmon in his mouth. He carried it well back onto the open bar, sat down and settled himself to his lunch.

Our side of the river was the foot of a steep, timbered slope. We would have to cross to continue, but we were too polite to interrupt the bear's meal, so we tied up the boat and climbed up onto a moss-covered knoll crowned with a grove of hemlocks. There in the deep shadow we settled ourselves to watch, and Ruth, as usual on such occasions, produced some candy bars.

From our vantage point, through the binoculars, we saw a most interesting part of the grizzly's feeding habits. He bit the salmon through the head to stop its flopping, then held it down firmly with both front paws, gripped the skin between his teeth and, with an upward swing of his head, ripped off a wide strip of skin from head to tail. This he ate with gusto. Then he rolled the salmon over with his paw, took off another strip, and ate it. In three or four rips he had the fish neatly skinned.

Meanwhile a smaller bear came out of the woods a little farther upstream, and started down along the edge of the water. The big bear gave him just one look but it must have carried a lot of meaning, for the smaller one turned back into the woods.

The big fellow went back to the riffle, caught another salmon, and handled it the same way. Then, after watching the water for a long time, he ambled off into the woods.

After a while we crossed and examined the big bear's leavings. There lay the salmon, skinned as neatly as a man could do it with a knife, and not a bite of meat gone. Scattered over the bar were dozens more in the same condition. Evidently the oily skin was all this bear ate, so long as the salmon were plentiful.

We rounded the next bend in time to see another large bear walking rapidly toward the woods, head up, nostrils testing the air, glancing frequently downstream. The wind had changed and was now blowing our scent ahead of us. That was the last bear we saw.

When we came upon a little clearwater creek cascading down the mountainside, Ruth mentioned lunch. She was always looking for brooks too small to accommodate salmon. She objected to drinking water where the bears washed their feet.

It was an ideal lunch stop. Nearby was a pile of driftwood where we gathered dry wood for our fire, and across the river an avalanche had mowed a wide swath through the forest, giving us a clear view of the craggy peaks. While we ate we watched three mountain goats, also lunching, on a narrow shelf on the face of a sheer precipice.

Just upstream from the slide path, the valley floor was littered with house-size boulders that had broken off and rolled down from the face of the mountain. Some had rolled clear across the river and up onto the opposite bank. Others lay in the river bed, and the water ran between them in deep, narrow channels.

Above this spot the river increased its pace, and after another hour and a half of lining we found the water surging and foaming between high, smooth canyon walls—the head of navigation for us. Of course we wanted to climb up for a look above the canyon, but already it was midafternoon and we were a long way from home.

Our last quarter of a mile was a long, swift riffle studded with large boulders, a dangerous piece of fast water for two in a boat, so Ruth walked the beach, carrying the rifle. Luckily she didn't need to use it. I ran the rapids in midstream, dodging boulders first to one side, then the other, shooting through narrow channels,

barely missing submerged rocks of which any one could have capsized the boat.

As I raced over a slick spot I caught a glimpse of something, a black and red creature at least half as long as my boat, moving on the bottom of the river. I couldn't stop and didn't dare look back, so I steered the boat to the bank and lined back up far enough that I could run over the spot again. That time, floating with less momentum, I saw the creature plainly and its mate beside it—the most monstrous king salmon I ever did see. I've seen thousands of salmon caught on commercial fishing gear, but none that came anywhere near these in size.

At the foot of the boulder-strewn rapids Ruth got aboard, and then came the part of the trip we'd been anticipating. Drifting with the current, using the oars just enough to steer, I kept the boat on the route I had selected, while Ruth watched the trees go by and kept a sharp lookout for game. Thus, where we had toiled and sweated, we rode with ease.

When we hit tidewater the current slacked, and we rowed on to the launch as the sun's last rays left the peaks. It had been a wonderful day, back in a new and beautiful area. Unquestionably prospectors and trappers had gone in there, but they had left no sign. We saw not a single human footprint, not a manmade trail or shelter, neither a stump nor a blazed tree nor remains of a campfire. It was the wilderness stronghold of the mountain goat, the bear and the salmon. We hoped it would stay that way for a long, long time.



## Chapter 21

I resented it when Ruth started telling me I was getting too old for handlogging. I was only sixty-two, and I had a million feet of timber I'd cruised out and wanted to put into the water.

But Ruth always knew how to talk me into whatever she wanted, and make me think I'd thought of it first. After she talked dude-wrangling long enough, it did seem like a good proposition. For years I'd guided friends on hunting trips, I knew the grounds and the habits of the game, and recently I'd equipped myself with a registered guide's license. Ruth, who would of course be active in such a venture, always got along fine with everyone and made a hit with her cooking.

My main concern was our boat. We were still living comfortably aboard the little cruiser *Alton*, and we often took out guests, but

they were Alaskans and boat people, accustomed to our kind of living. People who could afford Alaskan bear hunts were used to more spacious quarters, and to services and luxuries we never felt we missed.

Ruth had her answer, as usual. She said plenty of hunters would prefer to come alone, and would enjoy a sample of our intimate small-boat living. Time proved she was right.

Other problems might come up too. I don't know anything more like buying a pig in a poke than taking a stranger out on a bear hunt. All our clients would arrive as strangers. They would write that they wanted to come up and kill a grizzly or a Kodiak, and they wanted it to be a big one. Most of them had never been to Alaska, and some had never seen a big bear outside a zoo. How would they react when they did see one out on the hunting grounds? Could they face a charging bear without panicking? How well could they shoot? Could I depend upon them in an emergency?

As a registered guide I had a tradition to uphold. Our first duty was to protect our hunters. Since the inauguration of the registered guide system, not a single hunter had received so much as a scratch from a wounded or charging bear, although several guides had been chewed up. I didn't want to break our tradition, nor did I want to get chewed.

Ruth had her trepidations too. We had heard our guide friends tell about disagreeable, overbearing hunters who complained constantly about the food and their living quarters—the kind of character who won't let you forget he's Mr. Big, paying for service, and you're his servant. I know of one hunter in the Interior who demanded so much it took thirty-six pack horses to carry his outfit.

We could only wait and see what sort each new guest would be. All we had to go on was the black-and-white of correspondence, and the sourest people can write the sweetest letters. So it was with some apprehension that we waited to meet Murray, an attorney from Seattle. Standing with the group on the Bell Island float, watching the plane circle for a landing, Ruth looked over to me with a forced smile and indicated that the palms of her hands were sweating.

The plane taxied up to the float and our hunter stepped out. He never did tell us his first name. Medium height, broad-shouldered,



well fed, he looked the successful professional man he was. His greeting was hearty. We liked him immediately.

I made a practice of having my hunters do a bit of target shooting before any hunting. It gave them a chance to practice and get the feel of their guns again, and it gave me a chance to judge their ability so I could conduct the hunt accordingly. I was well pleased with Murray's marksmanship.

On our route to the big bear country was a creek where we could depend upon seeing black bear, and I usually stopped there for our first trip ashore. A big game license entitled the holder to two blacks, which most hunters liked to add to their list of trophies, and I liked to watch the hunter's reaction at sight of his first bear.

I led Murray over a well used bear trail to a knoll overlooking a grassy meadow, and we settled ourselves at a good vantage point shortly before the bears would start feeding. After the shadows had crept out across the meadow, a black bear walked out of the woods. He stood looking down toward the bay, watching and listening, then turned toward the evening breeze, which was drifting down the creek, and tested the air long and carefully.

He was a large male with a perfect coat, heavy and glossy. Murray leveled his rifle and sighted carefully. I waited for his shot, thinking I had myself a skinning job on the first evening of the hunt.

"I could hit that fellow right in the eye," Murray whispered, and put down his gun. Having watched him at target practice, I knew he could.

The bear, convinced he was safe, began feeding on the lush green grass, stopping occasionally to watch, listen and sniff the air. As he changed positions, Murray would sight through his scope then lay the gun across his knee with a whispered, "I could hit him right back of the ear." When the bear had eaten his fill, he walked ponderously back into the woods, never knowing he'd been the squeeze of a trigger from the end of his trail.

"Just watching him was worth two bear rugs," Murray declared as we got up to leave.

We hunted in several places without seeing any of the big bears, but blacks were everywhere. I led Murray up to sixteen in all, but he didn't fire a shot. "Someday," he said, "I might shoot one of those clowns."

One day we found the nest of a Canada goose, with four eggs, the first Murray had ever seen, and I think he was more pleased with the discovery than he'd have been with a prize bear.

With only one guest, Ruth's work was light and she had time while we were ashore to row around, explore the beaches or go fishing. While Murray and I were on an overnight trip to Reflection Lake, she set out the crab trap, and when we returned we found a big platter of dungeness crabs all ready for our mug-up.

Up in Burroughs Bay, with the launch anchored safely, Murray and I rowed up the Klahini River to look for signs of game. Rowing quietly, watching the banks for tracks, staying in the boat so we would not spoil later hunting by leaving our scent, we went through the meadows and around the wide bends where the river courses across the heavily timbered bottom land. At a shallow place, wet gravel and stones showed that a bear had just waded ashore. We crossed, found where he had entered the water, and backtracked him until I found a clear footprint in firm, wet sand.

I paid no attention to a bear's hindfoot tracks. It amused me when some cheechako hunter described the size of a bear by saying he could put his size-fourteen boot inside the track. I've seen tracks ten feet long—where the bear slid down a clay bank.

I remember one bear's tracks that were big enough to scare any greenhorn hunter. He was big, all right, and he had leaned upright against a tree to scratch his back. Underfoot was a layer of river mud, and as the bear swayed back and forth his big hind feet worked from side to side and slid forward. He went away leaving a set of tracks two feet wide and four feet long. Although he wasn't the biggest bear I ever tracked, he made the biggest tracks I ever saw.

If I got a clear print of a bear's front foot I could judge fairly well what size coat he was wearing. Up on the sand bar with Murray, I knelt to span the track and said, "He's just under eight feet."

"That's big enough," said Murray. A Western hunter, he knew what I was talking about. A bear is rated by the size of its hide, spread out. If length and width are equal and it measures seven feet each way, it is called a seven-foot bear.

I followed the bear's tracks until I was sure he was heading for the grass meadows at the mouth of the river, and would be feeding there in the evening. I selected a spot for our stand. A slough cut from the river into the center of the meadow and on its

bank was an old log with plants and shrubs growing out of it, an ideal place for a blind. We went to the boat for an early supper and when the shadows began creeping up the sides of the mountains, took our position at the blind. But the bear didn't show up.

With the first gray of dawn we were rowing back up the river, and as soon as we could see the sights of our guns we stepped ashore at the meadows. Many wary old grizzlies never show themselves out in the open in broad daylight.

A long, narrow point of spruce timber divided the upper and lower meadows. We had watched the upper one the night before, so this morning we went to the lower meadow, following close to the timber. Soon we found where our bear had been feeding, on the opposite side of the timber, not 200 yards from our stand.

We reached a place where we could see all the meadow. Back in the deepest corner, beneath thick, overhanging trees—was that black patch only a shadow?

The light grew stronger. The shadow moved out into the meadow and became a bear, a big one. He came steadily, quartering toward us. Suddenly he stopped and stood looking straight at us.

"Shoot!" I whispered to Murray. He took careful aim and fired.

At the crack of the rifle the bear went straight up on his hind legs and over backward, then lay on his back with all four feet in the air. He lay there without the slightest movement, at the foot of a steep bank ten feet high. Suddenly, in a blurred flash, he was gone, quick as a cat, up that bank and into the brush. Murray got off a snap shot, but there was no evidence that it connected.

Going over, we found a pool of blood beside the flattened grass where he had lain, deep claw marks halfway up the bank, and a blood trail leading into a well used bear trail that wound through a dense tangle of brush and fallen trees. It was little more than a tunnel and I couldn't see an arm's length into the brush. When I found I'd have to get down on all fours to crawl under a log, I turned back. To follow a wounded grizzly so soon into a jungle like that would be suicide.

Regulations specify that a guide must make every effort to find a wounded bear, and rightly so. Not only is it cruel to leave an animal to a slow, agonizing death, it creates a potential threat to anyone who comes along later. A bear with a rankling wound

becomes an outlaw. Even if the wound heals he carries the memory of pain forever after, and a heartful of hate toward all who walk on two legs.

Trailing a wounded bear through thick cover is the most hazardous part of all Alaskan hunting. Bears have a habit of circling, then lying in ambush, watching their backtrack. We went back to the launch for breakfast and a discreet period of waiting.

When we prepared to go look for the bear, Murray noticed that Ruth was oiling up her rifle.

"What are you going to do with that?" he asked.

"Take it along," Ruth answered.

"Do you mean *you* are going with us? Into that thick brush after a wounded grizzly?"

"Certainly," she said coolly. "Bill will need all the backing he can get. The more eyes watching, the better."

Murray stared open-mouthed, no doubt thinking that a woman would add to the hazards of an already hazardous undertaking. But Ruth was no ordinary woman. Her husband and three of her brothers were big game guides, her father had been one, and she knew the game as well as any of us. Nor could any of us, nor anyone else I ever saw in action, beat her marksmanship. For someone to back me up in an emergency, I had complete confidence in Ruth.

She slid cartridges into the magazine of her rifle, the .33 Winchester I'd used back in the Canadian Rockies, the one that had stopped my first charging grizzly with a hip shot at three paces. It was Ruth's favorite, powerful but light and fast. She dropped a handful of cartridges into her pocket and said, "I'm ready."

Back at the meadow, I led the way along the trail through the brush. A short distance beyond the log where I'd turned back, we came to a wind-downed tree. Its spreading roots, which had lifted the sod, formed a solid wall ten feet high and the bear trail went around one end of it.

Back of the wall we found where the bear had waited, watching his back track. If I had kept following, I'd have been three feet from him before I saw him.

He was hit hard, but a long way from dead. He would see us first, from a place of his own choosing. He knew this area as

thoroughly as I knew the deck of my own boat. If he would leave such good ambush as this, what else did he have in mind?

A little farther on we entered a wide flat, carpeted with thick moss and strewn with rotting logs, stumps and big hemlocks with spreading roots. We were relieved to get out of the dense jungle, but we were not out of danger. The bear could be anywhere, behind any one of those trees or stumps, watching and waiting. The flat was crisscrossed with bear trails, and the thick moss made it impossible to tell how recently they had been made. The bear was no longer bleeding much, so it took close scrutiny to tell which trail was his.

Now was the time for my backers to do their part. I posted Murray to one side, Ruth to the other, while I worked out the trail. Bending low, watching for splatters of blood, stooping to test a red spot on a ground dogwood leaf to see whether it would smear, turning skunk cabbage leaves to see whether bloody fur had brushed their under sides, I worked a few yards ahead then waited while Ruth and Murray moved up to new positions.

In that way we crossed the flat and worked up the steep slope beyond, to an uprooted tree that had fallen straight down the hill. In the hollow where the tree had once stood, the bear had rested again, watching his back trail across the flat through an opening between the tree roots. He had left so recently that I judged he had seen us coming.

This was an ideal ambush, a blind from which he could charge downhill, yet he had left it. There could be only one reason—he knew a better one. He was a dangerous antagonist, a wise one, and if I couldn't second-guess him, I was going to get hurt.

The trail led around the hill beneath a low, straight-walled cliff. I didn't like that cliff and I watched it closely, careful not to get far ahead of Ruth and Murray. Coming to a deep gulley which cut back through the cliff, I stopped and had my backers move up, Ruth to a big stump on my right, Murray to a log on my left. The gulley was steep, narrowed to a trail at the bottom, and for footing it offered wet, slippery slabs of rock.

I entered and stood looking for any sign that the bear had gone that way. Suddenly Ruth called, "Hold everything. I think I see something."

She was holding her rifle ready and looking up. "At the top of the cliff," she said to Murray, "just over Bill's head, right by that clump of ferns."

I was too close under the rock wall to see the top. Ruth and Murray were standing with guns ready, eyes glued to the top of the cliff where there was a clump of ferns and beside it, in deep shadow, a round, dark clump of moss.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the clump of moss started to rise. A big, furry head emerged, ears flattened, eyes blazing green, looking down on me. Ruth threw the gun to her shoulder, the sights lined, her finger on the trigger. But this was Murray's bear. She glanced at him. He was standing steady, rifle to his shoulder. His gun roared. A huge bulk hurtled from the top of the cliff.

"Look out, Bill!" Ruth yelled.

It came end-over-end, ten feet in front of me, and landed with a thud in a hollow below. Three guns were trained on it but it did not move. Murray's bullet had entered a nostril and come out back of the ear.

When I pronounced the bear dead, Murray whooped so the woods rang.

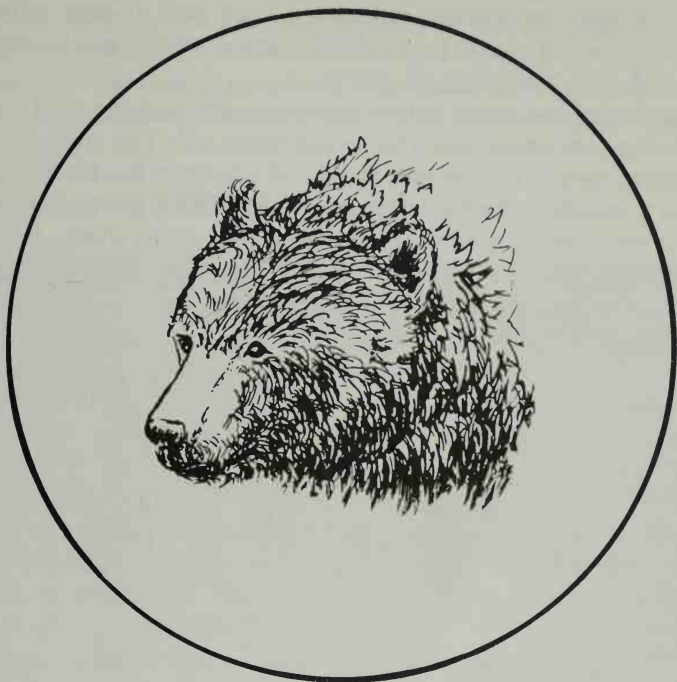
Now we had our skinning job. Ruth had her knife all whetted up for the task and as soon as I had the hide split, she pitched in to help. The three of us were unable to roll the carcass out of the hollow, so the task was more difficult, and the shadows were lengthening when we headed back to the boat. The hide squared seven feet ten inches—close enough to my estimate of "just under eight feet."

We took a well satisfied hunter to Bell Island. We had waited apprehensively for his arrival, but we now stood waving a reluctant goodbye as the plane took off with him aboard—a congenial companion and one of the finest sportsmen it was my pleasure to take afield.

We never got over feeling apprehensive as we waited for each new client, but all of them, hunters and fishermen, proved to be grand people. Even when success in the field was not complete, the trips were, and the expressions of thanks and appreciation were heartfelt.

Much of the credit was Ruth's. Her cooking, her spontaneous good nature, and her ability to make people feel at home were as important to the success of our dude-wrangling venture as anything I did.





## Chapter 22

Time and again I was asked, as probably all guides are, "But aren't you afraid of bears?"

I honestly thought I was not. I had great respect for the big bears—the grizzlies and the Kodiaks—just as I would respect a kicking mule, a biting sow or a Jersey bull. But when I thought of all the hundreds of bears I encountered, one in particular always came to mind. He gave me the biggest scare of my life.

In 1946, when we were dude-wrangling, I had as my client a doctor from the East. He had never been bear hunting, he had never even seen a bear outside of a zoo, but he wanted to kill one. To start, I'd take him up a stream where Ruth and I had fished

many times. We knew it was only a black bear stream, where I never bothered to take a gun. When we ran into a bear we'd just say, "Scat!" and keep on going.

We found the creek simply splashing with salmon, but not a sign of a bear anywhere. That could mean only one thing—a big bear had moved in. The only thing that can keep the blacks away from a creek full of salmon is a grizzly. He'll chase the blacks away from their fishing ground, kill them if he catches them, and eat them if he's hungry.

Being responsible for the safety of a cheechako hunter, I proceeded with caution. There was no bear sign until we got up to the big Dolly pool where Ruth and I did our fishing. Then, in a side slough, I saw a bear eating a salmon. There was an ideal route by which we could get within close range, so I motioned the doctor to follow in silence and led the way.

We came up behind a big drift log and peeked over. Our bear had finished his salmon and was walking across a wide gravel bar, broadside and only a short distance away. He was a grizzly, a huge one, but his pelt was ragged and worthless, unfit for a trophy.

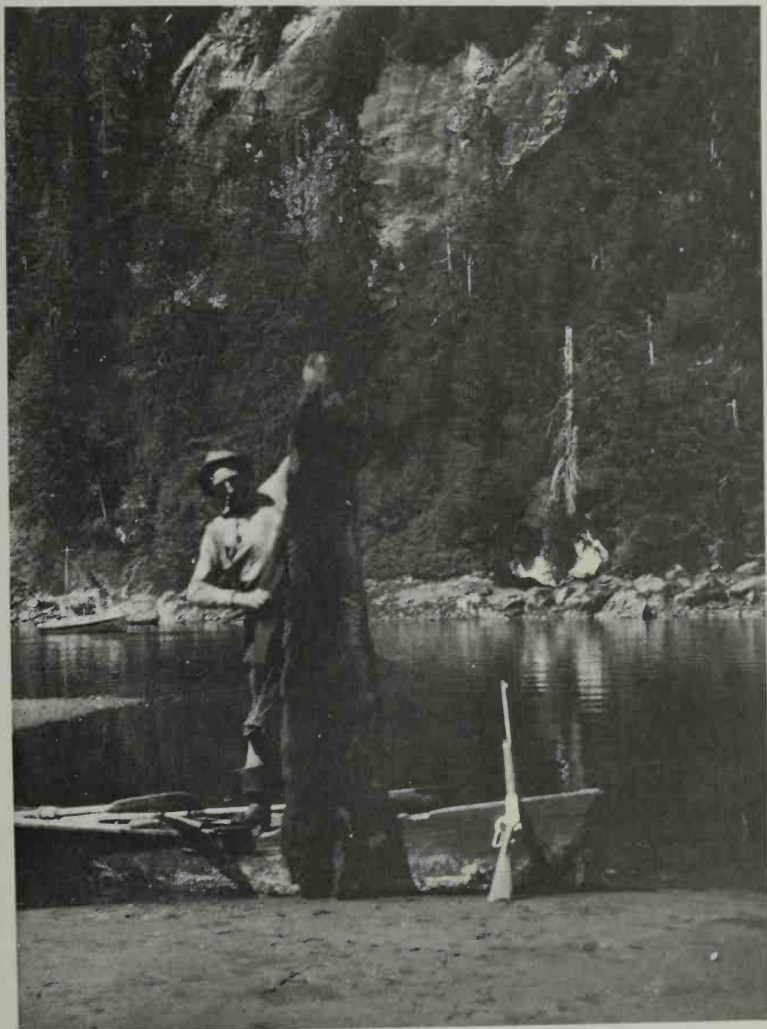
As long as we didn't want him, I wanted him to know we were there. I also wanted to see his reaction when he discovered us, so I stepped out in plain sight. Apparently he didn't notice me, so I shouted. No response. I let out a warwhoop and waved my arms, and the doctor, who had come out beside me, picked up a stone and threw it. Though it landed within three feet of the bear, the big fellow paid not the slightest heed. He kept going straight ahead with a slow, deliberate stride, across the open bar and out of sight behind a point of low willow bushes.

In all my experience with bears I had never seen one act that way, and I didn't like it. His mangy hide showed he was far from healthy, but he couldn't have been so blind and deaf that he failed to notice us, right out there in the open just across the creek, so close that the doctor easily threw a rock at him. Bears, though noted for their poor eyesight, are quick to detect the slightest movement at close range, and their hearing is exceptionally keen.

What I should have done, as soon as I discovered that a grizzly had taken over the creek, was to back out discreetly and go to some other bear pasture, but even now I felt no real apprehension. I wanted to see what the old fellow was up to.

Many bears will act unconcerned while you're watching, then the moment they're out of sight, take off for parts unknown. We gave this one time to put plenty of distance between himself and us, if he wanted to, then went over. The size of the footprints, and

Result of one of Handlogger's many encounters with bears.



their depth in the hard-packed gravel, proved we had experienced no optical illusion. I trailed him across the bar to one of the riffles, where his tracks went into the water. Right across the riffle was a big, well used bear trail leading up into the woods. But our bear had not gone that way. Following up the creek, I watched both banks closely but found no place where he had come out of the water.

Never had I known a bear to wade into the water and then deliberately change directions to cover his tracks. This one was a crafty old rascal, up to some skullduggery. More than ever, I wanted to know where he had gone.

Across the upper edge of the gravel bar was a long, narrow row of young alder bushes with dense leaves to the ground and the creek just behind it. I led the way around behind the alder point, where we could see several hundred yards upstream. There were no open beaches in sight. The creek, strewn with stumps and uprooted trees, ran between low, brushy banks. I'd expected to see the bear up there somewhere, but the area was empty of wildlife.

To go farther meant wading the creek, thigh-deep, or crawling through the thick brush where visibility was nearly zero. At our feet was waist-deep water, at our backs the thin row of alder bushes shutting off our view of the bar where we had last seen the bear. He could be anywhere now, behind one of those stumps, in the thick brush on the bank, or halfway up that mountain yonder. I would have preferred to be alone. I knew nothing about how my hunter would act in an emergency, and I could see he was nervous in spite of his effort to seem calm.

There was a light downstream breeze, so smoking would in no way affect our hunting farther upstream. I suggested we have a smoke while we watched to see whether the bear would show himself upstream. The doctor lit up eagerly. We stood smoking in silence, watching the deserted wilderness, while the smoke drifted back through the alder bushes.

The result was electrifying. An explosive, coughing snort, a splash, the rattling of gravel. I'd heard that spine-chilling snort before—the challenge of an infuriated, charging grizzly.

He was out of sight behind the alders, but I knew he was coming. I was ahead of the doctor on that narrow strip of bank

between the bushes and the deep water, and how I got past him without knocking him down, I never knew. By the time I reached the point where I could see the open bar, the bear was almost across it, heading straight toward the spot where we'd been standing. He was coming at unbelievable speed, eyes blazing, ears flattened, lips curled, fangs exposed, mouth foaming, breathing in short, coughing snorts.

If anyone tells you a bear stands on its hind legs when it charges, you can be sure he never saw a bear charging. That's as silly as saying a dog stands on its hind legs when it is going to bite you. I have faced the charges of many grizzly and brown bears and they were all the same. They come on all fours and incredibly fast. Even a scared deer hasn't a chance.

The fellow who writes that he "took deliberate aim and fired" never had a bear closing in on him. You haven't time to aim. You shoot automatically, fast and straight, or you don't come back to write about it. In all my mix-ups with bears at close range, by the time the smoke had cleared away I couldn't recall seeing the sights, or even lifting the gun.

Nor does the guide, under such circumstances, hold back and give his hunter the first shot. Survival takes priority.

I was thankful I had my .405 Winchester that day. Its 300 grain slug hit a blow of 3,300 pounds. The bear came to a complete stop, as if he'd run into a stone wall. He stood with feet braced, blood gushing from a hole in his throat, eyes glazed, swinging his head slowly from side to side.

The doctor, beside me now, coolly slammed a shot to the base of the ear as the bear swung its head, and it went down for the count.

When we were sure there was no life left, we went over, stepping off ten paces from where I'd stood—just the distance the bear covered in two jumps as he charged across the bar.

Now we saw why this bear was different. He had no more hair than a hog. In his flank and shoulder were several holes big enough for me to stick my finger into them, all open sores, the results of fighting. One front foot had a bad cut. One of the big front fangs was broken off and the remaining stub was black and

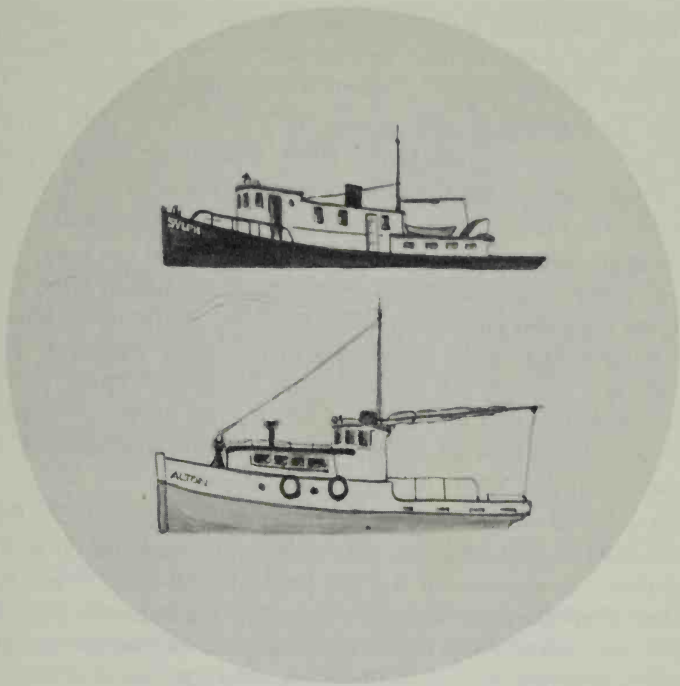
ulcerated. He was sick, crippled, in pain and mad at everything that moved.

I backtracked him and found how he had eluded us. He'd walked in a straight line until he was out of our sight, then entered the water, doubled back down the creek toward us, and climbed out on the willow point. There he had lain, concealed, while we walked by within thirty feet. He had stayed until our scent, brought to him on the wind, infuriated him to the point of charging. Only his declaration of war as he launched his charge had saved us and caused his undoing.

Of the hundreds of bears I encountered, blacks and cinnamons, grizzlies and Alaskan browns, all the way from Oregon to the Yukon, in more than forty years in bear country, that was the first one to make a deliberate, unprovoked charge. Other bears that had charged me did so only after being wounded.

I never was scared during that kind of action. There wasn't time—and it would only add to the danger. I didn't get scared this time, either, until the next day. The day after was even worse, and on the third day I was really scared. For months I had daytime nightmares as I thought of the many times Ruth and I had gone Dolly fishing at that very spot, and I, in spite of Ruth's arguments, hadn't taken a gun.





## Chapter 23

The freezeup of 1946 came in November and continued week after week without a break. Our summer's work was finished, we had our winter meat put away, and we were marking time in Ketchikan until the trapping season.

Every evening we would go out to Ruth's mother's place in the north end of town. Ruth's brothers, Jack and Bruce, were also marking time, so there would be tall stories about logging and hunting, fishing and trapping. Gram's was always a popular place, with friends and neighbors dropping in. No one ever went to the door, or even got up to greet new arrivals. If they did knock, someone would call, "Come in," but most folks just walked in,

stamping the snow from their feet. If the coat rack was filled already, they'd throw their jackets and mittens into a corner as they went to the stove to warm their fingers.

After an evening of card games, or just visiting, with three or four conversations cross-firing, Gram would put on the coffee pot, the girls would set the table, and everyone would eat. No one was dieting then, it was too soon after the depression.

It was always midnight before Ruth and I would get away to go home. Bundled up in woolens and fur caps, we would hurry along with the dry snow crunching under our feet, the frosty air sharp in our throats, our noses stinging and our eyes watering. There would be a glow in the sky from the Northern Lights, and the plank streets rattled and popped when cars went by. Seepage from the hill had built up glaciers in places along the sidewalk, and we went around them to keep from falling.

Home for us was still the *Alton*, moored now at the City Float. She would be dark and cold. Our only heater was the cookstove, and although we had left the fire banked with coal, it would be burned down so there was little heat left. Ruth usually piled into bed to keep warm while I built up the fire and sat with my coat on until the boat was warm. If I threw out the garbage and a tin can rattled and rolled across the top of the water, I knew the harbor was iced over. It would be two o'clock before I had the place warmed up so I could bank the fire and go to bed.

We didn't get up early. We weren't going anywhere. When we did wake up the fire would be low again, or out. The windows would be iced over so we couldn't see out, and the ceiling glistened with frost. It took a lot of fire to warm things up enough for Ruth to get up and make breakfast.

One day when she came home from shopping, she was all excited. "I was talking to Jim Pitcher," she told me. "He wants to sell the *Sylph*, and he's giving us first chance!"

I knew the *Sylph* well, a fifty-five-foot cabin cruiser, built and used for charter work. If we were to keep on taking out hunting and fishing parties, she would be just the boat for us. But a boat her size cost so much, I'd always brushed the idea from my mind.

"Jim said he goes down every day to check on the boat," Ruth went on, "so I told him we'd meet him tomorrow and go down with him."

If Ruth had promised to meet him, she would be there, and I might as well go along.

When we got to the appointed corner we saw Jim coming down the hill, hobbling with his cane. He was getting along in years now and his arthritis was so bad it was hard for him to run the boat any more. A cold wind was blowing down the creek. When we got to the Stedman Street bridge we turned up our coat collars and found it hard to keep to Jim's slow pace.

The *Sylph* was moored out at the end of the Yacht Club float, in Thomas Basin. With the north wind sweeping across the water, we were blue with cold by the time we got there. Jim hadn't been down since the previous day, so he looked over the mooring lines with a critical eye before he unlocked the door. When we stepped inside, Ruth and I looked at each other in astonishment. It was as warm and cozy as on a summer day.

Jim led the way down into the galley, which was spotlessly clean, looked at the fire in the oil-burning kitchen range and put on the coffee pot.

Jim Pitcher was a real sourdough. He came North during the Yukon gold rush and prospected and mined from the Klondike to the Bering Sea. He was also a storyteller, and while we thawed out with mugs of steaming coffee, he regaled us with stories about dudes he had taken out on sightseeing and fishing trips. We were in a jovial mood when he showed us around the boat.

There was hot and cold running water, kept at city pressure by an automatic pump. There was a built-in refrigerator, a galley table that would seat six, cupboards holding a full set of dishes and cooking utensils, and locker space to store a month's supply of groceries for a charter party. Aft was a stateroom with four built-in bunks all made up. The roomy bathroom had a shower and a dry room for wet clothes. The forward stateroom had two bunks, also made up, and a desk, clothes closet and big storage lockers. The pilothouse was roomy, with another bunk and spacious lockers.

Below deck was the engine room, with the electric generating plant and electric pumps for water and oil. But what impressed me were the storage tanks. The gas tanks and the fresh-water tanks had capacity for a month's cruise, and the stove-oil tank for three months.

She was just the type of boat we had talked about, dreamed about, planned to own someday. But what about the cost? We both abhorred debt. Always we had paid as we went, but during the lean years of the depression, when our income was some \$400 a year, we'd found it tough sledding. Though confident that I could always earn our living, I felt apprehensive about the idea of buying on credit.

Still, we would put the boat to work for us, take out bigger parties, command higher rates, and she'd be a big help in my logging. She'd be a roomy, comfortable place for us to live, and we could take Gram and the nieces and nephews out with us in the summer.

So I talked to the banker and we closed the deal. Jim was an excellent host, storyteller and salesman, but it was really that warm, cozy galley on a cold November day that sold the *Sylph*.

When we moved off the *Alton*, we moored her in Thomas Basin with a "For Sale" sign on her. One morning, after a stormy night, as I was on my way to look after her, a friend stopped me and asked where I was going in such a hurry. When I told him, he shook his head sadly. "A man with a wife and *one* boat has troubles enough!" he said.



## Chapter 24

We searched several hundred miles of shore in quest of a new winter trapping ground, and found the best mink sign in Manzanita Bay, fifty miles from Ketchikan on the back of Revilla Island. A Forest Service float, conveniently located in a sheltered bight near the entrance to the bay, would make an excellent moorage for the *Sylph*.

Manzanita Bay is beautiful in summer, with its irregular shore bordered by forests of cedar. A large stream enters the head of the bay, and back of the big sand beach is a shelter cabin where the trail starts up to Manzanita Lake, a popular place with anglers for its oversize cutthroat trout.

Now, in mid-December, the trail was deep with snow, the lake was frozen over, and we were not interested in trout anyway. We were taking full advantage of the short trapping season.

On the morning of December 19 we got up to find two inches of snow covering the deck and the float, and the air was thick with big, fluffy flakes gently floating straight down. Almost the shortest day of the winter, with barely seven hours of daylight at best, the thick snow and heavy clouds made it dawn even later than usual. After we had finished breakfast we still could not see the shore.

But I had chores to do so I put on my outdoor clothes and went out. First I went to the fish line we had tied to the float. Feeling something jerking on the line, I pulled it in—a turbot, or left-handed halibut, a fish the mink considered edible even if we didn't. I saved it for bait, rebaited the hook and threw the line out again, then sorted out the traps we would need and scraped the snow out of our two skiffs.

By then it was getting light. I had half a mile to row to my traps, outside the bay, so I went to tell Ruth I was leaving. She had her trapping clothes laid out but was still doing her housework. Her first traps were under the trees close by, and it was not yet light enough for her to start.

Out in the open channel the water was glassy smooth, and briny enough to melt the snow as it fell. On shore, however, all my traps were buried in snow and I had to take them up and move them to sheltered places beneath trees or logs.

In my trap at the otter den I had a fine, big otter, and in the next one, a nice mink. I was well pleased, for at the price of furs that winter, one pelt a day meant big wages.

By early afternoon, finished with the outside traps, I came back into the bay, working the north shore. The falling snow had gradually thickened. Now the big flakes were so dense I couldn't see halfway across the bay, and in the little indentations along the shore it lay so thick on the water that I had a hard time rowing through it. This was mostly fresh water from the creek, which didn't melt the snow as the salt water did in the open channel.

The current of the creek was carrying out the snow so there was only a thin layer out in the middle of the bay, but the situation would bear watching. If the snow should quit drifting out, it could get so thick I'd have difficulty getting back to the boat. I wondered about Ruth. She should be directly across the bay from me, but by now I couldn't see a quarter of the way to her shore.



Well, I consoled myself, she knew the danger as well as I did and would be keeping close watch too.

Now all my traps were out of working order. I had to dig them out and find new places for them, and I still had a load of traps to set as soon as possible. There's no profit in traps lying in a skiff.

I found some good mink feeding ground, all littered with fresh crab shells. Absorbed in setting traps, I lost track of time until I took a load of traps up into a grove of trees and found it was hard to see the mink trails. Already the gloom of evening was settling down. Suddenly I felt a compulsion to get back to the *Sylph*, and a premonition that Ruth was in trouble.

Hurrying to my skiff, I rowed out into the creek current. Big patches of floating snow were drifting out, but I rowed through them without feeling resistance. Opposite the launch I headed in, and made a startling discovery. The float was in a back eddy, and the snow that had been drifting past me was collecting in this eddy. It was several inches thick and packed so solidly it brought me to a complete stop. I simply could not row through it. I tried rolling the boat to make waves and break it up, as we break up thin ice, but the waves rolled through the snow and left it packed as tightly as before.

I was using the sharp-bowed skiff because I had the longer trap line, out into the open water. Ruth was using a square-ender because it was easier to get out of, going ashore on slippery beaches. She would get out twenty-five or thirty times a day, so it was a great saving in time and energy. If she hadn't returned to the *Sylph*, she'd be hopelessly stalled somewhere in that square-ended boat.

The only way I could move was by standing in the bow and making long, sweeping strokes around the bow with one oar. It was slow, tiring work, but after a time I could see the faint outline of the launch. Still I could not tell whether Ruth was aboard. The farther I went into the eddy, the more solid the snow pack, but with one sweep from the right, then one from the left, gaining the width of the oar blade with each sweep, I worked in until I could see the *Sylph* plainly. The windows were all dark.

Maybe Ruth had come home early and was taking a nap. Maybe she hadn't gone out. Wishful thinking. I'd never seen weather bad enough to keep Ruth home when she was mink trapping, and

she was more likely than I to get absorbed and forget the passing of time.

Finally, long after dark, I was able to reach the launch with an oar and pull myself in. Barely taking time to tie up my skiff, I hurried aboard. All was dark. The oil stove was still burning low. Ruth's outdoor clothes were gone. I hurried out to look at the float. There were no tracks in the snow, no skiff. She was still out there in the dark.

But where? She had traps set in both directions along the shore. She might have gone out into the creek current to try coming in as I had. I shouted again and again but got no answer. The snow gave my voice a muffled sound, and no echo came from shore. I turned on the boat lights and tried to think what to do. I could run through the snow with the power boat, but I couldn't get close to shore and I'd be unable to hear Ruth above the noise of the engine. I might be running off and leaving her when she was close by.

Finally, after a long wait, I heard a muffled thump-thump-thump from the direction of the shore—Ruth pounding on the side of her skiff with an oar, a signal we used as it saved energy and carried farther than the voice. I shouted and blinked the mast light. She answered by blinking the flashlight she carried for signaling after dark.

We had 400 feet of heavy line for deep sea fishing. I tied one end of it to the float and started working my way out through the snow pack, paying out line as I went. The going was even harder here, almost like trying to make headway through a layer of concrete, but at last I got close enough to reach Ruth with an oar and pull her up so she could hold onto my boat from hers. Then, hand over hand, I pulled in the fish line and towed us over the snow to the float.

The snow-packed eddy had fooled Ruth, too, but the incoming tide had opened a narrow lane between the pack and the beach, so she'd been able to make her way along the shore.

"How did you expect to get out to the boat?" I asked.

"Oh, I knew you'd find some way to get me. Or I could build a fire and stay under a cedar if I had to."

For one who had been marooned in the dark, Ruth was in high spirits. Hers hadn't been a long day and she'd kept warm and

dry, but this was no cause for elation. When her boat was tied up to the float she began digging into a mound of snow on the seat.

"Here, take these," she said, handing me a mink, then a second, and a third. They were wet and bedraggled, but from their size and weight I knew they'd have large, prime pelts, worth at least twenty-five dollars each. Still, three mink were nothing to be so puffed up about. She was holding something back. Had she found a rich new trapping ground? Or a gold mine?

When we had brushed the snow off each other and gone inside, Ruth reached into her jacket and brought out a beautiful large, dark marten, carried there to keep it dry. The long, dark, silky fur was the finest I had seen in years, easily worth more than all three of her mink together. She had reason to be puffed up.

\* \* \*

Dude-wrangling kept us busy all the next summer. Ruth had the responsibility of shopping, laundry and such for twenty- and thirty-day trips away from town, and while we were out she had the cooking and housework. She had to entertain women guests and think up reasonable answers to endless questions, some of which were too unreasonable to be answered at all. Even when the women went ashore, Ruth had to stay aboard and have appetizing meals ready when we returned. She never complained, but I suspected she found it irksome at times.

When our last party had gone home, in late September, we were ready for a hunt of our own. Ruth, free at last, wanted to get out into the hills and stay as long as she pleased.

We had spent a good part of the previous winter planning a goat hunt with her brothers, Jack and Bruce. Although our own private jaunts were preferably impromptu, an expedition was different. During long winter evenings we would amuse ourselves by planning in great detail just who would go and where, what we'd take, how long. Then if things weren't shaping up right as the time drew near, nothing more was said about it. The point was in the planning.

Jack and Bruce were logging at the head of Wilson Arm, snugly surrounded by good goat mountains. Good for the goats, that is. The approaches to their pastures were so uninviting that most hunters preferred to go elsewhere. We, on the other hand,

preferred new hunting grounds and thought nothing of mashing brush. Ruth and I decided to run out and see the boys.

We found them out of meat and itching to climb the hill. Jack's wife agreed to stay with Gram, who was with us on the *Sylph*. Bruce's wife, Norma, would go with us. But the peaks were wrapped in fog. While the boys kept at their work, Ruth and I cruised down the inlet to survey a route up the chosen mountain. A steep, narrow, heavily timbered valley came down its side. I studied it foot by foot through binoculars, memorizing the location of every cliff, every deep ravine, every ridge from the water's edge to timberline, for once we entered the timber we would not be able to see ahead. Then Ruth and I got a deer for camp meat, picked berries, and went duck hunting. Mostly we watched the weather.

"What gun are you taking?" Jack asked Ruth one evening.

"None," she answered. "I don't want to shoot a goat, I just want to go up the mountain."

Well I remembered a time when Ruth wanted very much to shoot a goat, but I knew and shared her present feelings.

On the sixth day the clouds vanished and the radio weather report promised a fair tomorrow. Before its sun touched the bay we were cruising down the inlet in our skiffs, and the mountain peaks were bold and clean against the sky.

Our route was a steep, steady climb but we took it at our leisure. Bruce and Jack examined each big spruce, estimated its size and value, and picked a place where they might fall it. Ruth and Norma preferred logs that were already fallen, to sit on.

At lunch time we were still far down in the timber, but now it was scrub hemlock and yellow cedar, the trees spaced well apart. An open spot on a knoll, near a small, sparkling stream, gave us a partial view of the goat pastures above. We threw off our packs and built a fire to make tea.

Another hour and a half of climbing took us to the timberline meadows, carpeted with rich grass and sprinkled with deer lilies. Scattered here and there were clumps of short, stunted trees or shoulder-high brush, and on the knolls stood the weathered ghosts of dead trees—grotesque guards to the goats' domain.

Across a small plateau rose the mountain in a near perpendicular slope, and at its base grew a clump of mountain hemlock, low and bushy-topped. They marked timberline, our

last chance at campfire wood, the ground beneath them was covered with dry needles, and out in front was a moss-rimmed pool. Here we would camp.

But chopping and fire-building would come later. We were in goat country. Jack and Bruce had their minds on meat, while Ruth cast speculative eyes at the steep ground above us. Bruce and Norma, on her first real climb, elected to hunt the knolls that rimmed the plateau. Jack would go up the right side of the big peak. Ruth and I would keep to the left.

Jack, Ruth and I started together. The slope was so steep we had to make toeholds and pull ourselves up by the brush. Ruth and I were scarcely halfway up when Jack swung his long legs over the rim and disappeared.

With the steepest slope below us, Ruth and I stopped to rest. Looking some 500 feet almost straight down, we could see a goat feeding calmly on one end of the plateau while Bruce and Norma walked toward it from the other end. It was a big goat, conspicuously white, and they were close but obviously unseen and unseeing. A low ridge, undistinguishable from our vantage, hid them from each other.

I attracted Bruce's attention and motioned toward the goat. Abruptly he stopped and Norma, a few steps behind, came up and stopped beside him. Shortly the goat looked up at them. Moments passed as they, the goat and we stood motionless. Then the goat turned, walked rapidly to the rim, and went out of sight toward the lower cliffs.

"Why didn't you shoot?" I asked Bruce later.

"Shoot that beast?" he answered, "Why, he was big as a horse!"

Ruth and I continued to climb, each yard gaining us a wider view over the tops of distant ridges and peaks but always, just beyond, another and higher point promising an even better view. The vegetation was scant—a few scattered, stunted bushes clinging to crevices in the rock, small patches of mountain bunch grass scarcely two inches high, but mostly it was bare granite, ground smooth and polished by some long-gone glacier.

Now we were up where we could look down into the head of the valley up which we had climbed, and in a little pocket on the farther side we saw five goats feeding.

We kept below the rim so we wouldn't disturb game on Jack's side of the mountain. Coming over a rise, we looked down and saw three goats not a hundred yards below us. They saw us immediately, looming against the sky, and moved calmly away. On and on we climbed, Ruth in the lead, higher and higher, far above the goat country, above all green plants, with the only living thing the gray lichens on the rocks—an inanimate country of cold gray granite. Each point appeared to be the summit, but always there was another just beyond and a little higher. Our stops were frequent but brief. With hardly a look at the scenery, Ruth would move on and I, letting her set the pace, would follow.

At last we came to a rock pinnacle only a couple of feet higher than the surrounding rock. Now, all directions were down. We had reached the summit. Ruth went over and stood on top of the pinnacle. "I made it!" she shouted gleefully. "I got to the top in one day."

There we sat, for the rest we had earned and the view we had come for. The sky was a clear blue, the sun was warm, and not a breath of air stirred. We passed the binoculars back and forth and looked, turned to new positions, and looked some more.

To the east was tier after tier of sharp, jagged peaks set close together like barnacles on a rock. On their slopes were fields of last winter's snow, here and there the blue ice of a small glacier, and on the tips of the higher peaks, a light dusting of the coming winter's first snow.

To the north we looked down on the silvery course of the inlet and out to Behm Canal. Mountains that looked high from the boat were below us now, and we looked across their summits. Deer Mountain, which looms over Ketchikan, looked low and insignificant. To the west, we looked out across channels and islands to the blue Pacific, stretching clear across the horizon.

We were reluctant to leave. Rarely was a day so clear, and we might not get up here again for a long time. At last we got up, but before starting down the peak we peeked over the rim and found ourselves looking into a round, steep-sided basin that apparently was the headquarters of the mountain goat population. In groups of four to six, we counted twenty-two goats.

We were on our way again when we heard a shot, short and flat, almost inaudible. Moments later the echo, long and loud, reverberated from the cliffs and rolled through the canyons.





"I made it," Ruth shouted.

"Jack got a goat," Ruth announced as the echo died away. We angled over to his side of the mountain and soon saw him beside the goat. He saw us and sat down to wait for us and the camera. It was a plump three-year-old with a clean white coat. We all posed with it, then Ruth and I went on toward camp while Jack dressed out the goat and spread the meat out on clean boulders to cool. No need to worry about predators so high on the mountain.

That evening, after a hearty supper, our campfire of mountain hemlock blazed merrily and the smoke spiraled straight up toward a million stars. A bright glow rimmed the horizon to the north and a battery of searchlights sent beams up from behind the hills,

playing back and forth, reaching high into the sky and then receding. The Northern Lights were especially lively, and our mountain campsite was a box seat at their show. Watching the lights, talking, drinking coffee, we stayed up long after we should have been asleep.

At last, tired and knowing we needed a rest, we crawled into our one wide bed, our feet to the fire. But old "Rorey Borey Alice" wasn't through with her light show. She grew brighter, spread wider, made bright bands overhead and wide curtains that quivered in a cascade of fire clear down to the horizon, all the while shooting her searchlight beams high into the sky. It was one of the finest displays of Northern Lights I have ever seen.

Sleep didn't come easily. There would be a guarded whisper, "Look at that, now!" and, "Look over there!" Soon everyone would be awake. Someone would get up, stir the fire, put on the coffee pot and we'd all be up again.

I don't know how many times we went to bed that night. Finally, in the wee hours, we all went to sleep.

It was a good trip and we decided we would go again next year. We told our friends about it and one after another declared they would go with us. By spring we had a party of twenty-six.

But it didn't turn out that way. None of us went. For Ruth and me there was never to be another goat hunt.



## Chapter 25

We were well pleased with our first season as charter boat operators. Of course we had more responsibility and less freedom than we were used to, both afield and afloat, but we had the nicest people as clients and the work was a pleasure to us both. Then, too, it was more remunerative than logging. A couple more seasons like the last, and we'd have the mortgage on the *Sylph* paid off. The future looked bright.

During the winter we were busy with correspondence and preparations for the coming season. Then the clouds began to gather. Rumor had it that the Coast Guard was tightening restrictions on charter boats. I investigated and found the rumor was only too true. The *Sylph* would not pass the new inspection. Our dude-wrangling had come to an end.

Still, the *Sylph* had been used as a charter boat for years. Maybe the new rules would be relaxed a little.

Meanwhile I would go back to logging. The demand for spruce logs was good and I knew just where to get them. I had a nice show of big spruce on steep ground, lots of stumpers and big trees, easy to get. I'd have a full summer's work there, a big raft of fine logs come fall, and enough standing timber to keep me busy there through three or four more seasons.

Ruth, never one to bemoan the injustice of fate, declared she was eager to get back to the old kind of life. We would have quiet water in a beautiful setting, with a trout stream nearby and hooters in the hills. And of course she'd have her garden. As we would probably be spending several summers there, she'd make a better garden than usual. She took out strawberry and rhubarb plants, and while I was busy with preparations for logging she set out the plants in the rich soil at the foot of a slide, where winter snows came down from the peaks.

One of my first trees was a five-foot spruce growing at the top of a straight rock wall. It was good to get back onto the high springboard with the smell of fresh-cut spruce in my nostrils. My ax bit deep into the soft wood. I aimed the undercut carefully toward the water, down a straight, smooth chute through the timber. That tree was sure to stump in, and it would be worth a week's wages.

With the undercut chopped deep and true, I got down from my board and prepared to saw up the back cut. That ready, I went back to my board.

Then it happened. One minute I had a million feet of timber cruised out ahead. The next minute I was through handlogging forever.

Beside my tree, lying at a steep angle, was an old hemlock log with the bark off and the sap wood wet and slippery. When I hopped out onto my board it sprang down, skidded on the slippery log, and was thrown out of the board hole. I landed on the hard ground ten feet below.

I knew instantly what had happened. When getting off the board I had pulled it in toward the bank, and then I'd forgotten. It's a lucky handlogger who can both forget and regret. Ruth was right. I was too old to be handlogging.

No bones were broken, but my back was so nearly broken I could barely move. Fortunately the ground was steep and smooth. I slid down to my skiff and the tide drifted me home. Ruth helped me aboard, started the engine, and took me to town.

The last I heard, the big spruce with the undercut was still standing, with my springboard still lying beneath it. Ruth never did get back to see whether her strawberries and rhubarb grew.

But I had handlogged until I was 65 years old. I had earned the right to my title for the rest of my days.

You can't eat a title, however proudly you wear it, and it won't help you pay off a mortgage. My self-confidence was shaken as much as my body. In debt for the first time in my life, cut off from both logging and dude-wrangling, age rapidly catching up with me, I faced the future with an apprehension I had never before experienced.

"Don't worry," Ruth would say, reassuring as always. "Just get well. Something will turn up."

Was she really so optimistic? Or was she putting on a brave front for my sake? I didn't know, but she was right, as usual.

While we were tied up at the City Float and I was still recuperating, a man from the Fisheries Research Institute came aboard. He wanted to charter a boat for research work on salmon in the area of Icy Strait, an all-summer job. There would be five fishery biologists aboard. They would do all the hard work, I would run the boat, Ruth would do the cooking. The Coast Guard gave me a permit for the summer, the biologists moved aboard, and we headed for Icy Strait 300 miles to the north.

At fish traps the boys tagged and released pink salmon, 300 to 500 at a time, then later searched the streams for the tagged salmon, to determine their migration routes. We visited every cannery and the boys surveyed every stream from Murder Cove to the Indian Islands.

That is beautiful country in summer. We cruised Chatham Strait, Peril Strait and Icy Strait. Chatham Strait and Lynn Canal make a 200-mile channel cut straight into the mainland, both of its banks formed by high, snow-capped peaks. When you look up this channel on a clear day, both water and peaks disappear over the horizon.

We anchored near Point Adolphus, where we could look into Glacier Bay. There, range after range of serrated, snow-clad peaks



The *Sylph*.

rose like giant steps to the 18,000-foot crest of Mount St. Elias. Among the peaks were broad snowfields, and the glint of blue and green glacier ice. Huge icebergs drifted out of the bay, and we chipped off fresh-water ice thousands of years old.

In Spasski Bay, Ruth and I explored a deserted homestead. The buildings were intact but nature had reclaimed the fields. They were a solid patch of wild strawberries. I spread out my raincoat and we worked around it, then together carried it back with all the berries it would hold. That evening Ruth placed a big dishpan heaping full of strawberries on the table, and the boys stuffed themselves with strawberries and cream.

In Basket Bay we rowed into the inky blackness of a limestone cavern, where migrating salmon enter their spawning ground through the bowels of a mountain.

Our fishery biologists were students from the University of Washington, just boys to Ruth, to be pampered and teased. When they lamented the lack of a tub bath, Ruth told them about Tenakee Hot Springs. We had stopped there, and while the boys were busy with their work, Ruth had looked the place over. The springs enter a single pool, enclosed by a bathhouse where men





Ruth picking berries.

and women bathe at alternate times, and according to a local woman, the village gossip sessions took place in the pool.

Ruth and I visited at one of the big canneries while the boys surveyed a nearby creek. Canning was to start the next day, we learned, and the cannery boat was bringing out the women of the crew. At supper Ruth told the boys, "The women are coming out from Juneau this evening to work in the cannery. All nurses and school teachers, I hear."

The boys hurried through their meal, scrubbed themselves and put on clean clothes, and were waiting on the dock when the boat arrived. The first woman down the gangplank was an over-plump matron leading two small children. The next had a baby in her arms, and the third, having imbibed too freely, needed help to disembark. A score more crowded the deck, native women with their families, every one.

When the boys caught Ruth peeking out the window with a sly grin they retired sheepishly to their room.

One sunny day in Chatham Strait Ruth prepared lunch, then came up to the pilothouse to relieve me at the wheel. After a leisurely meal I strolled back to the pilothouse, and found we were bearing down dead center on a sleeping whale. I leaped to the wheel, rolled it hard over, and held my breath. The sixty-foot leviathan, startled from its slumber as we slid past, raised a mighty fluke into the air then churned the water to a foam a bare pike pole's length from the side.

"I just wanted to see what he'd do if I hit him," Ruth said.

Acres of timber flattened by winter gales, and big drift logs a hundred feet up shore where giant waves had tossed them, reminded us often of Bruce's remark. "You'll love that country," he'd said, "but come the first of September, get out!"

As summer waned, gale-lashed channels held us in Swanson Harbor for three days, fearing lest the *Sylph* be tossed up into the woods. At the storm's end we were glad to slip out of the harbor and head for home.

Pacific salmon, as they come in from the open sea, congregate off the mouths of the streams before ascending to their spawning grounds. These stream mouths, closed to fishing, are a great temptation to unscrupulous seiners, because often the salmon are schooled there by the tens of thousands. Consequently, during

the salmon season the Fish and Wildlife Service had stream guards stationed on the main spawning streams to discourage poachers.

Ruth, when she was trying to talk me into quitting handlogging, had suggested I apply for a job as stream guard. It was honest, responsible work, but it was for wages. I hadn't worked for wages in decades and I was proud of it.

Next spring, 1950, my strength and confidence somewhat restored, I was busy with the annual overhaul, getting the *Sylph* in readiness for whatever might crop up. Ruth was shopping when she met John Wendler, local head of the Fish and Wildlife Service enforcement division.

"Do you think Handlogger might be interested in a job as stream guard?" Wendler asked.

"Yes, I'm almost sure he'd be interested," Ruth replied.

A tumble off a springboard can do a lot to a handlogger's pride as well as to his back, so when Wendler came down to the boat he found me quite willing to listen.

"You know I was hurt and haven't got over it yet," I told him, anxious that there be no misapprehensions. "I couldn't even lift a good-sized salmon now."

"We know plenty of fellows who'd lift 'em if they get a chance," Wendler said with a grin. "We know you're too old to sell fish."

I knew what he meant: The wages of a stream guard weren't high, but there were always poachers willing to slip him a payoff if he'd look the other way while they seined out part of the fish he was supposed to be guarding. This payoff would be quite a temptation to the type of young fellow who wouldn't take the job in the first place unless he was down on his luck, and expected he'd be long gone to bigger money before the next season, anyway. A man of my age, on the other hand, knew he was through going after bigger money. He'd settle for the stream-guard job and do it to the best of his ability, hoping to come back season after season as long as he was able.

Up in Wendler's office, I got writer's cramp filling out forms, but when they were finished I was an employee of the federal government, with the powers of a United States marshal.

The policy of the Fish and Wildlife Service was not to get a lot of convictions, but to prevent violations. Just knowing a stream guard was around, maybe watching unseen or at least likely to

show up any minute, was enough to discourage most would-be poachers.

My duties also included some research work—surveying the available spawning grounds, removing obstructions to the salmon run in the streams or reporting them if I couldn't remove them myself, reporting the arrival of the salmon, determining the number of each species in the stream.

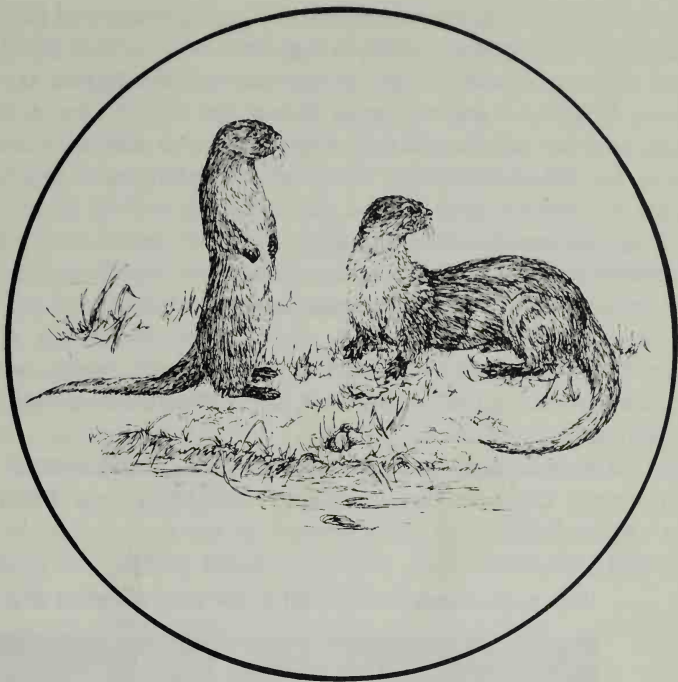
The stream surveying was the part we enjoyed, as it meant new streams to explore. Ruth often went with me, and fished for trout or picked berries while I counted the salmon. And the more salmon there were, the more bears.

My first assignment was in Kasaan Bay, on the east side of Prince of Wales Island. We had spent little time in this area so there were numerous streams we had never followed. One time, at the head of Twelve-Mile Arm, I left Ruth and the skiff in a high-tide pool where the big Dollies were crowding one another, while I went on upstream to see how the salmon were doing. Returning a couple hours later, I found her sitting idly in the skiff in the middle of the pool.

"What's the matter?" I asked. "Fish not biting?"

"Oh, yes, I pulled out Dollies until my arms ached," she answered. "Now there's a bear right in here on this bank, and one on that bank, and one down there in that first riffle, and another just crossed where you're standing."

Our first season reconciled me to that kind of work for wages. I continued as a stream guard with the Fish and Wildlife Service and, after Alaska became a state, with the Department of Fish and Game.



## Chapter 26

When we outfitted for the season our plans always included Gram, for of course she was going along. She had countless friends in town as well as her sons' families, and she was welcome anywhere, but like most mothers she preferred the company of her daughter. In later years Gram lived with us so much that the *Sylph* seemed more like home to her than her place in town. In fact, she eventually gave up her own home and spent the last four years of her life with us.

She had her own cozy stateroom where she could rest and relax as she chose. She always respected Ruth's propriety and never interfered in any way, but when Ruth went with me up the creeks or on my patrol, as she often did, Gram was in her glory. She was mistress of the galley and we were sure of good things to eat when we returned.

Gram loved fishing, especially trout fishing. She wanted nothing to do with fancy rods and reels, but given a stout willow pole, she could throw trout back over her shoulder as far and as fast as anyone. When she was no longer able to get up the creeks, Ruth would take her salmon fishing. Here again she wanted none of "those newfangled outfits," but she was adept at dragging in salmon hand-over-hand with a good, strong trolling line.

It was the same with berry picking. Ruth would seat Gram comfortably on the beach, then roam the woods gathering berry-laden branches to take back so Gram could pick off the berries. Sometimes they found places along the rocky shore where bushes drooping with berries overhung the water, and at high tide they would sit in the boat, bend the bushes down, and fill their buckets.

For the several seasons I was stationed in Moira Sound, we used Kegan Cove as our headquarters. There, in a beautiful

**With a stout pole Gram could throw trout as far as any.**





landlocked harbor, was a Forest Service float where we moored the *Sylph*, and I patrolled by speed boat. Gram loved Kegan Cove. She and Ruth had flower boxes on the float, and the bright flowers attracted a stream of bees and hummingbirds. Gram, seated in an easy chair where she could watch this busy air traffic, spent countless hours fishing for shiners. Useless fish they were, but fish.

I'll have to admit that Gram, after a lifetime of pioneering, didn't take fish and game regulations very seriously. Closed seasons, bag limits and such came to Alaska long after she did, and they didn't impress her one bit.

Years earlier, when we still had the *Alton* and were handlogging in Neets Bay, we built a little floathouse with a cozy bedroom so Gram could come out with us during the summer. One morning she came aboard all excited. "Get the gun!" she told us. "There's two deer on the beach."

Ruth and I went out to have a look. A hundred yards away, walking with dainty steps, were the deer. Gram was provoked when we made no attempt to get one.

"But it's three weeks before the season opens," I explained, "and besides, those are does."

"There's just as much meat on a doe," she fumed, "and it'd taste as good now as it will three weeks from now."

One season we went out to Kegan early in June, as the Fish and Wildlife Service wanted a report on the total escapement of red salmon. This meant I was to make a careful count each day of all the salmon that went up the stream to the spawning grounds.

When we arrived I noticed some big splashes just off the mouth of the creek. The first of the salmon run had already arrived. I lost no time going upstream to make my first survey. Carefully I searched every pool and riffle and eddy, counting the salmon as I went.

Up the creek was a big dead-water pool where a clump of wild crabapple trees, growing on the brink of the low, mossy bank, leaned out over the creek with their thick lower branches brushing the surface. All beneath them was in shadow. I approached carefully and stood watching. A slight movement caught my eye. Something, I thought it was a small salmon, lay almost motionless in the outer edge of the shadow. I stepped closer and it moved away from me into the sunlight, a rainbow trout about twenty

inches long. In the smooth, clear water all its spots and bright markings showed plainly — a really beautiful fish. Then, a few feet away, I saw another so nearly like the first as to be undistinguishable.

When Ruth took her trout rod and headed up the creek, I went with her and led her out to the edge of the pool under the crabapple trees. There were the rainbows, where I had seen them before. We admired them for some minutes, then Ruth went on up the creek to fish in the riffles below the lake.

For the rest of the summer, whenever we went up the creek on salmon survey or for trout fishing or berry picking, we would stop to look for our "crabapple rainbows," and they were always there. If we approached carefully they would lie within ten feet of us. If we took a step toward them they would move out just that far, but any quick move would send them for cover under the branches. Trout fishermen came by the dozens. We showed our crabapple rainbows to trusted friends but never so much as mentioned them to strangers, and when we left in late September the rainbows were still there.

When we arrived the next year we hurried up the creek to look for our rainbows. There they were, even prettier and noticeably larger, and again we watched them all summer.

By the third summer they were a good twenty-five inches long and ranked with the best rainbows in the stream. A few fishermen found them and spent long, persistent hours trying to entice them to strike, but they had chosen their spot wisely and were not to be fooled by artificial lures. At times, as I checked licenses and bag limits, I felt concern for our rainbows, but they proved quite capable of eluding human predators.

But when we arrived for the fourth season our crabapple rainbows were gone. A family of otters had moved in and, expert fishermen that they are, they had succeeded where human fishermen had failed.

One calm September evening I came in from my last patrol just after dark. It was between the two seining seasons so there were only a few trollers in the area, now anchored up for the night. A couple of pleasure boats had been moored at the float over the weekend but now, in midweek, we had Kegan Cove to ourselves.

After our evening mug-up I stepped out on deck for a final check. The riding lights on the trolling boats, anchored in the

outer harbor, were as motionless as the pale stars in the clear sky. Tomorrow would be another good day for surveying the creeks.

Always watching for any fishing boat that might be prowling in the dark, I listened for the drone of motors. There was not a sound except the splashing of salmon over near the mouth of the creek. The tide would be full in an hour, and the fish were always more active just before the flood tide.

I checked the engine room, then took a final look around the cove. There would be a big tide tonight. Already the grass flats were covered. The salmon still splashed. A night bird called from the dark forest a hundred yards away. Everything was secure. I turned in.

Next thing I heard was Ruth's startled announcement, "The boat's listing!"

Instantly awake, I leaped out of bed. Listing she was, so badly that I had a hard time getting to the door. Out on deck, I saw that the trees on shore were directly overhead. The big tide had parted the anchor chain on the float, setting boat and float adrift, and the stern of the *Sylph* was hung up on a short rock ledge that projected from shore while her bow was out in water so deep I couldn't see bottom at low tide.

A hurried glance at the clock: Two hours past high tide, four more hours of receding tide. The water level would drop another fifteen feet, and long before that, the way we were listing, the *Sylph* would roll over and go to the bottom of the bay.

I ran to the wheelhouse, started the engine, and with it wide open gave her full speed ahead. The propeller, now hardly covered, threw a geyser of water clear into the woods but the boat didn't budge.

Ruth ran back to Gram's room, shook her awake and told her, "Get your clothes on. We're on the beach." Ruth's idea was to get Gram out onto the unsinkable float before the *Sylph* rolled over, which it seemed she was about to do.

We had the boat snubbed up tight to the float. It, being on the deep water side, was still lowering with the outgoing tide and pulling that side of the boat down. Realizing this, I cut the float loose and it drifted away into the darkness. Now the *Sylph* rolled back to an even keel, but she was sharply down at the bow and going farther down by the minute.

I tried the power again. With so little water over the wheel, it was a useless effort. Wondering what to try next, I was just cutting the motor when Ruth called to me to keep it running. She knew that the boat was more inclined to roll with less water under her. She threw both side doors open, stood on one side until her weight brought it down, then ran through to the other side and stood until it came down. Back and forth she ran, bringing the high side down each time, each time rolling the boat a little farther, while I kept the engine roaring wide open. Thank goodness Ruth hadn't been dieting. Every ounce of her came in good stead that night.

I think it was on the fifth roll that the boat started to slide, grudgingly at first. Then she shot down the slippery rocks and out onto the water, afloat. I tried the steering gear. It worked, so I steered to the middle of the cove, dropped the anchor, and shut off the motor.

Our mutual sigh of relief was cut short as we thought of Gram. We hadn't seen her. Had the rolling of the boat thrown her overboard? We couldn't have heard her call above the roar of the engine.

There was a light in the galley. We dashed below. Fully dressed and snug in her favorite nook behind the galley table sat Gram, calmly eating a bowl of cornflakes.

"If we were on the beach, we were on the beach," she said, "and I was hungry."



## Chapter 27

The October storms were going full blast when we came in from our summer's work, and the drenching rains and gales continued day after day. Unable to get out for our fall hunting, we lay moored at the City Float, chafing at the delay.

At last the weather cleared and we were preparing to leave, when a mining man came down wanting to charter our boat. He and his crew would sleep aboard while they did some work on his claims, Ruth would do the cooking, and all I had to do was keep the boat in a quiet harbor. I'd have time for all the hunting I wanted to do. That sounded good to us.

On the morning we were to leave, I had to make just one more trip up town. Hurrying, I stepped off the boat onto the float. The planks, worn smooth and now green with slime after weeks of

rain, were slippery as ice. My feet skidded and flew out from under me. I came down hard.

Countless times I'd fallen farther, and bounced up and kept on going. This time I didn't bounce. I felt a crunching sensation and a dull, paralyzing pain shot through my hips.

"You're in no hurry," I said to myself. "You aren't going hunting. You aren't going anywhere."

But I did go somewhere. An ambulance came, I was carried up to it on a stretcher, and for the first time in all my seventy years I went to the hospital. The doctor looked me over, took some pictures that showed my naked bones, and used some high-falutin' words.

"What in hell does that mean?" I asked.

"Your pelvis bone is broken in two places."

They put me in a room with a couple of other fellows who had broken bones. One of them was running a baseball pool, which was popular with both patients and staff. One morning a bevy of nurses had come in to place two-bit bets, when they brought in a man who'd been mashed up in a construction job accident. With him came the Mother Superior and some of the Sisters. Just then Ruth walked in, and her eyes popped at the sight of nine white-robed women in my room.

"See that little blonde?" I whispered. "She's the one who gives me my bath."

Ruth gave her a hard look, then called the ambulance and had me taken back to the boat. "They can't do a thing for you in the hospital that I can't do here, and better," she declared.

The doctor agreed. He gave her a heavy canvas sling to suspend over my bed, and there I stayed for the next two months. Ruth took care of Gram and me too, and the neighbors, feeling more free to come and visit on the boat, did all they could to help. We hadn't known we had so many friends.

The trapping season had been reduced to one month every second year, and this was a trapping year. I knew how much Ruth longed to be out on the trap line, but when December came I was still flat on my back. Ruth didn't complain. She made plans for a big Christmas dinner on the boat.

When at last I was able to get out of bed I was dismayed to find how weak and helpless I was, but I exercised as much as possible, quietly checked the game laws, and watched the calendar. The



season would open December 20. On the eighteenth I said, "Let's go trapping." I started to explain that I wouldn't dare go ashore for fear of falling, but I thought I could run the boat and if Ruth wanted to trap . . . But she wasn't listening. She was flying around, inviting people not to come to Christmas dinner.

Gram would go too, of course. She would do the housework, dry Ruth's wet clothes, get lunch when Ruth was ashore. Gram wouldn't think of not going when there was something she could do to help.

We didn't get out ahead of time as we usually did, but Ruth was ashore before noon on opening day, setting mink traps. This time, with hospital and doctor bills tabbed against us, she was out for the money and she took full advantage of every minute of the short winter days.

After breakfast, while she was getting ready, I would run the *Sylph* to the place where she wished to go ashore, timing it to arrive just as early as she could see to work. I would nose the boat close to the beach so she could reach her first trap with a few strokes of the oars. Then I would back off, shut off the motor, and go to work on the furs, drifting with the tide and glancing often out the window to keep Ruth in sight.

There were stretches of shore where she had no traps, places where there were no mink or where smooth rock walls made it impossible for her to get up into the woods, and there were places where she crossed the inlets or the mouths of deep bays. To save her time and energy I would pick her up and tow her boat past these stretches, for she sometimes had her traps strung out along fifteen miles of shoreline.

At midday Gram would prepare a hot lunch and I'd run in so Ruth could come aboard for a hurried meal. Often she would work until it was so dark I'd lose sight of her, and she'd have to blink a flashlight signal so I could find her. Back aboard, she would change clothes while I ran to our harbor.

Aside from wanting the money, Ruth was in keen competition with experienced trappers who were our neighbors, and she was really showing them what a "lady trapper" could do. This, as one would expect, roused admiration in some, raging jealousy in others.

On Christmas day we carried on as usual. Because of the restriction of the trapping season we had given up going to town

to celebrate Christmas. We'd have our turkey dinner with family and friends after trapping was over.

Next evening we were snug in a little cove we often used for a night anchorage, sheltered on all sides but the southwest. From the way big drift logs were thrown up onto the rocks, we didn't want to be caught there when the wind came from the southwest, but it had been holding in the southeast for days and Ruth had traps there she wanted to look at in the morning.

After the supper work was done, Ruth curled up with a magazine and I got busy with the furs, as was our custom. It was about nine o'clock when she remarked that it was snowing. I looked up. In the light outside the window I could see big, feathery flakes drifting gently straight down. Fine, I thought. With an inch or two of fresh snow, Ruth could tell where every mink had traveled and get a fair idea how much fur there was in the area.

A bit later I noticed a slight slant to the falling snow, and when I went to the door to throw out a mink carcass, I found it snowing so hard I couldn't see shore. The boat was still steady, but I didn't like that slant to the snow. A little later, when we began to feel a slight roll to the boat, I wished we had gone to a different anchorage. I glanced at the clock. Five hours since it got dark; eleven hours more before daylight. We knew anchorages safe from a southwester—miles away, through narrow channels studded with submerged rocks—and the snow was so thick I couldn't see the length of the boat. We'd just have to wait for better light.

We watched closely. The wind, growing stronger, began blowing into the harbor. The snow was whizzing straight across the windows, and the boat, having swung into the wind, was pitching wildly. Ruth stowed things for rough water. I started the engine to have it warmed up. By eleven o'clock the snow was three inches deep on deck. Then it began to rain, and as the rain thinned the falling snow I could make out the white line of snow on the beach above the water level. Hurriedly I pulled the anchor and we got out.

With all the lights on the boat turned out, I could follow the faint light streak of upper beach and, well acquainted as I was with the contour of the shore, keep on course with reasonable safety. To Ruth, straining her eyes in the pilothouse beside me, all was solid

blackness. It was an ordeal for us both, but we made it safely through a channel less than fifty yards wide that wound in and out between submerged rocks like a snake. By midnight we were anchored down in a safe harbor, ready to call it a day and go to bed. All except Gram. She was hungry.

Dusk found us in the same cove again two days later. Again the evening was calm with only a gentle rain falling, but we didn't want any more of that place for a night anchorage.

"Let's run up and visit the Millers," Ruth suggested.

Wes and May Miller were old friends and neighboring trappers. Though it was already too dark under the trees for work on the trap line, we could reach their anchorage before it was too dark for travel. Wes used a skiff on the trap line and had their big boat moored parallel to the shore at the head of the cove, with bow and stern anchors out and bow and stern lines to trees ashore.

"Tie up alongside," he told me when we came in. "This is a calm harbor. We've trapped here four winters and there's never been a wind in here yet."

They came over to our boat so Gram could get in on the visit. Ruth and Wes compared catches, speculated on fur prices, told tall tales about the big ones that got away. Gram and May discussed their knitting. It was a rather unusual party, I thought, on a wilderness trap line in midwinter. Gram, the senior member, was eighty-five; Wes was my age, seventy; May was sixty-eight, and Ruth, a mere girl of fifty-eight.

About nine o'clock we noticed a gentle roll to the boat. Nothing, Wes assured us. They often got a little roll when it was blowing outside. Minutes later the two boats came together with a jarring crash that took us out to investigate. A light wind was blowing into the cove, but considerable swell was coming with it, causing the two boats to bump. We'd have to do something about it.

Wes, in his rowboat, took the end of my 200-foot shore line and headed over to a small point to the windward, but the line proved too short so we had to give that up. While this was going on, Ruth was doing her best to hold the two boats apart. By now a full storm wind was driving into the harbor, with a six-foot sea running. I would have to move out. Wes came back aboard to help his wife back to their boat, but May was a heavy woman and troubled with arthritis. Ruth helped too but they couldn't make it. Meanwhile I tried to hold the boats apart, but I was too weak to

keep them from coming together with one shuddering crash after another and the heavy guard on the *Sylph* threatened to smash in the side of the lighter boat.

Now the problem was to get the *Sylph* away from Wes's boat. The wind had driven us so far toward shore that Wes's stern anchor line was stretched taut and fouled on our rudder. Ruth and Wes worked our boat ahead until it cleared the anchor line, then I used the power to swing clear and back out. Before we got clear, one of Wes's lines had parted, one of our skiffs was carried off into the darkness, and the other skiff was swamped. But we could do nothing about any of them. The rain was coming down in torrents, and the night was so black I could judge our position only from the phosphorescent glow where the breakers dashed against the rocks. Furthermore, my legs were so wobbly I had to hang onto something just to stand still.

With the anchor down, the *Sylph* soon swung her bow into the wind and Wes rowed back to get May. Ruth helped again but the seas were so big they couldn't get May into the rowboat.

The wind was now a shrieking gale. With all my anchor chain out the anchor was dragging on the rocky bottom, and the stern of the *Sylph* was dangerously close to the rocks. I called back that we were dragging anchor and would have to get out. Wes made one more try. A comber caught his skiff, filling it half-full of water, and he drifted back into the darkness.

Ruth took May below, told her and Gram to get settled for rough water, then turned out all the lights so I could see better. When she came back to the pilothouse we moved out between the foaming headlands into the full force of a sixty-mile gale.

Coming over I'd noted a lot of floating drift logs, some up to fifty feet long and two feet in diameter. If we should hit one of them it would be disastrous, but we could only hope we wouldn't. The spotlight was useless. Shining on the torrential rain and flying spray, it made such a blinding glare I couldn't see past the bow of the boat.

Out of the cove and the direction of the wind determined, we headed for the nearest sheltered anchorage, about four miles away. The spume-laden wind screamed through the rigging and the luminous whitecaps, charging at us, sent tubfuls of solid water high over the bow, crashing into the pilothouse windows, threatening to cave them in, then washing back, scuppers full,

across the deck. Only briefly between waves could I see out through the drenched windows, and all I could make out was the contour of the mountains, a shade darker than the sky.

We wondered how the old girls were faring, but Ruth did not dare get out on deck to go back and see. She'd have been swept overboard. Expecting momentarily to feel a crash as we struck a log, arms aching from rolling the wheel, legs so shaky I was standing on sheer desperation, I navigated the longest four miles of my life.

At last we got on the lee side of an island, out of the storm. The rain slacked and a break in the clouds allowed a few stars to peek through. Now I could see well enough to let Ruth go back and turn on the cabin lights.

She found the cabin a shambles. Things had been thrown from cupboards and shelves. Pots, pans and kettles had been tumbling from one side of the room to the other, crashing and banging from wall to wall, while Gram and May, sitting in the dark, could only guess what was going on. Yet there they were, one with her arms wrapped around the goldfish bowl, the other holding the canary cage. May, who had survived many years of gas-boating in Alaska, apparently had no worries except for her husband's safety.

"Oh, he's all right," Ruth lied. "We saw the light go on in your boat."

She'd seen nothing of the sort, of course, but no use letting May worry about him all night. We were doing enough of that. We felt as if we had run out on him, though with Ruth the only able-bodied seaman aboard, there hadn't been a thing we could do to help him.

As for Gram, in all the difficulties we encountered during the years she lived aboard the boat with us, she gave never a hint of worry, never a complaint, no back-seat driving. She would wedge herself into her favorite corner with pillows and wait calmly, with full confidence in our ability to bring her safely through. When at last we reached quiet waters she'd most likely say, "I'm hungry."

Another blinding shower struck us as we reached the anchorage, and in the uncertain light I let the anchor go before we reached our preferred spot. It hit bottom in twenty fathoms, so I called it good enough. After the galley was put in order we



Ruth aboard the *Sylph*.



needed no suggestion from Gram. We were all ready for a mug-up.

The storm blew itself out during the night and in the morning the water was perfectly calm under a cloudless sky. We were worried about Wes, so as soon as there was light enough for dodging drift logs I started rolling in the anchor chain. When the slack was taken in the chain came up tight and I couldn't gain another inch. I pulled from every direction, tried every trick I knew, but all I could make that anchor do was pull the bow of the boat down.

The sun came up and the north wind began to blow. That harbor would be dirty in a north gale. We had to get out. Still I fought the obstinate anchor. Last night, when we'd wanted to stay in the harbor, it kept dragging. Now, when we wanted to leave, it wouldn't budge.

At last the anchor came free without anything to show what submerged obstacle it had fouled on, and we sped out to look for Wes. As we entered his harbor he came out on deck, smiling as serenely as if we'd been ashore for a picnic.

No one suffered any ill effects from that frightful night except Ruth, the kid of the crew. As she'd stood on the deck of the *Sylph* holding the two boats apart, they'd rolled so badly that the knees of her slacks were smeared with the red bottom paint of the other boat. Her arms, legs and back were painfully stiff and lame. So, we all went up to Bell Island Hot Springs to hasten her recovery.

One evening the Game Commission boat came in. The two young fellows aboard were capable, conscientious wardens and also good public relations men who knew they needed the cooperation of legitimate trappers. They explained that they were checking trap lines and taking pictures of mink traps, and would like to look at Ruth's traps.

This was such an unusual procedure that I was mystified, until I drew from them that they had just come from visiting a neighboring trapper, an eccentric old-timer who always boasted about his huge mink catches. Learning that Ruth was beating him three to one, he flew into a rage and if she'd been a man, there would have been a fight or a foot race. Instead, we surmised, he had vented his spite by informing the wardens that Ruth was using illegal trapping methods.

Ruth was willing to cooperate and eager to get back to her traps, but the wind had swung to the northeast and was blowing such a gale that she, with her lame back, simply couldn't go. The best she could do was mark the location of each trap on their chart.

They left the next morning. That evening they returned and tied up alongside us. "Here, Handlogger," they said as they tossed over six mink they'd taken from Ruth's traps. "Something for you to work on." They inquired about Ruth's back and advised her that the wind was still too strong for her to be out tending her traps.

Again the next evening they nosed alongside, and called over to Ruth, "Benny Ruhland said to tell you to come on up there. He'll divide his ground with you, so you can trap where the water's smooth."

Benny was a real friend. When Ruth was able she took up all her traps and we ran up to see Benny. They established a boundary line and she finished the season in calmer water.

I never did get off the boat that winter, but it was a rugged one for Ruth. Still, it had its compensations. When the month's trapping was over and we went into town, she received a check for \$1,010 for her furs.



## Chapter 28

My stream survey work required us to move from one creek to another as the different runs of salmon came in. One day in Moira Sound, as we ran into Dolomi Bay, the silvers were jumping in every direction. As soon as I let the anchor go and shut off the engine, Ruth called down to Gram, "Do you want to go out and catch a salmon?"

Knowing the answer, Ruth began getting the trolling gear ready and by the time I had my boots on, Gram was dressed for boating and out on deck, chafing at the delay. We helped her into the skiff and Ruth took the oars. I took the other skiff and headed for the creek.

Gram got her first strike before I reached shore so I stopped to watch the fun. Feet braced, a determined set to her jaw, Gram was hanging onto the line as if her life depended upon it, while the

salmon on the other end, silvery sides flashing in the sun, was leaping frantically and thrashing the water to a foam.

Ruth was giving instructions but Gram, as usual, didn't hear a word. No coaxing or persuasion could get her to relinquish an inch of line. Hand over hand she dragged the thrashing fish to the side of the boat. Ruth was standing by with the gaff but she didn't have a chance to use it. Gram, with a mighty heave, swung the fish over the side and it flopped at her feet in the boat.

When I returned they were back aboard the *Sylph*, Gram proud of the five big silvers she had caught but feeling abused because Ruth had made her quit fishing when they were biting so well. But Gram was eighty-five years old, and Ruth was afraid she would exhaust herself. They'd go fishing again tomorrow, Ruth told her.

But they did not go fishing on the morrow. By morning it was storming. The heavy rain brought the creek up, bank-full, and by the time the weather cleared all the salmon had gone on up to the lake. Gram had done her last fishing, a grand finale to a long life of fishing with willow pole and hand line from the purling brooks of Colorado to the spectacular fjords of Alaska.

One evening as I came back into Kegan Cove from my patrol in the speedboat, the lights on the *Sylph* looked especially good. After a week of rainy weather the September air had cooled, and long trips in the open boat were chilling. I wanted to peel off my rain clothes and hug the stove for a while, but Ruth, with a worried look, called me aside.

"Gram is sick and I think we should get her to a doctor," she said. "I'll go with her. Bob said he'd take us in or call a plane. Or do you think we should take her in?"

I'd been out where I could look out into the strait, and the ground swell was rolling high. Gram would get awfully seasick if she had to make the trip by boat. And I needed to stay on the job. The salmon were coming in strong and I had a hundred thousand fish to watch. Bob, out on a trout-fishing trip, had his boat tied to our float and a radiophone aboard.

"I'll have Bob call a plane," I said.

Ellis Airlines promised to have a plane stop on its return from the West Coast next day. Ruth was up half the night packing Gram's things and cooking for me. She forgot I had batched for years before I met her, and she thought I would starve if I had to live on my own cooking.

In the morning we moved out into the center of the inlet. It was too deep for anchoring so I cut the motor and let the boat drift. There Ruth could go ahead with her preparations and we'd be on hand for the plane.

Presently there was the drone of motors and the big twin-engine amphibian came in over the hills to the westward. It came in low past our boat to make sure of our identity then, slapping the wavelets into a cloud of spray, landed on the water and taxied back to float nearby.

We helped Gram into the skiff and I ferried my two girls over to the side of the plane, where the door swung open. There was no time for fond farewells. I was busy seeing that my heavy skiff didn't bump anything, and as soon as Ruth stepped aboard, the door shut behind her. I backed off fast to get clear of the hurricane wind and spray as the motors roared and the plane skipped away, bounced into the air, and headed for town. I watched it go, higher and higher, until it was a mere speck in the sky. Ruth and Gram would be in town before I got back into the harbor.

So I was back to the lonely business of coming home tired, hungry and cold to a cold boat, cold stove, cold food. But I had little time to feel sorry for myself. I was the only watchman in the area. I had half a dozen bays to patrol and a dozen creeks in which to count the salmon on the spawning grounds. I had to estimate the numbers of salmon coming into the bays from the sea, make out reports, do the housework.

When the supply boat came in to bring another drum of gas and pick up my reports, there was a letter from Ruth. They had gone right to the hospital, and Gram had cried at the humiliation. Eighty-five years old, a great-grandmother, and she had never been a hospital patient before.

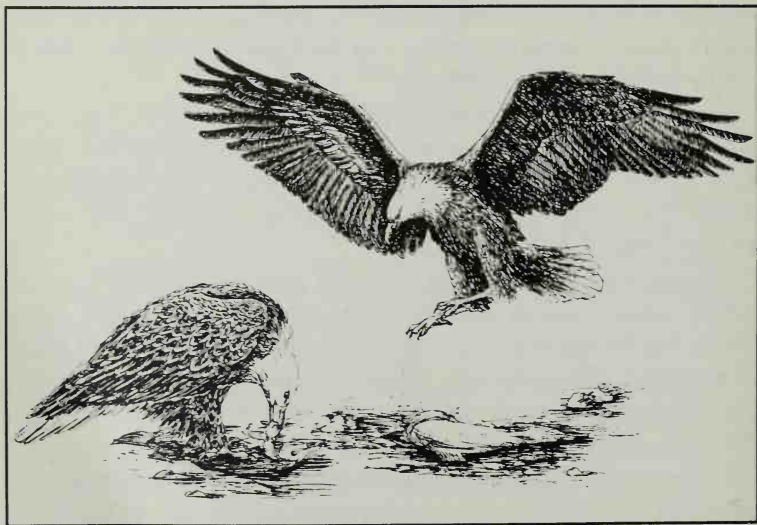
I missed the chats we'd always had over our second cups of coffee, when I would recount my experiences during the day's patrol. The fishing boats, the deer on the beach, the herds of seals on the rocks, the whale with which I'd nearly collided. What's the good of seeing interesting things and having experiences if you can't tell someone about them?

But one day I had an experience that was worth telling a long time after it happened. I was going up to survey one of the more

isolated streams and, as I'd seen a wolf on the beach on my last trip there, I took along Ruth's little .257 Roberts.

There was no wolf so I leaned the rifle against a tree and carried my snozzle stick. That is a stout walking stick, good insurance against falling on the slippery, slimy boulders when I waded the streams. An old-timer had once told us about hitting something on the "snozzle" with a stick. I appropriated the term and joked that, should a bear dispute the right-of-way, I'd hit him on the snozzle with my stick.

This creek was one of the most primitive. There was no one living on it, nor any trace that anyone ever had. There were no trout, no game animals, no minerals, no merchantable timber, so there was no occasion for anyone to go near the place except some fishery agent like myself, who liked to count salmon on a new creek. I found it swarming with a fresh run of dog salmon, flopping and splashing from bank to bank. When I forded the stream I got splashed clear to my ears. Dead, spawned-out salmon lined the banks and half-eaten fish left by bears and wolves were scattered through the brush. The air was a bedlam of screaming, squawking birds as I disturbed the crows, ravens, eagles, gulls and mergansers feasting on salmon and salmon eggs.





About half a mile back I found my way blocked by a tangled mass of uprooted trees, so I climbed the bank to get past this obstruction. A large fallen tree offered a good trail, so I climbed up onto it to keep out of the brush.

I'd gone about half the length of the log when I noticed some bushes waving. Something was coming down the hill toward me. It wasn't a bear heading for the fishing grounds, it was traveling too fast. A deer? I watched closely but the brush was too thick.

It kept coming, straight toward me, fast. Not a deer. I shouted. It should have stopped or turned aside. Instead its speed increased. At twenty yards I still couldn't see what it was. I hollered some more but it didn't turn. It was something big, coming deliberately at me. There were no grizzlies around, nothing I'd seen that would bother me in all the years I'd worked there. My snuzzle stick looked awfully inadequate, but trying to run would be useless.

At thirty feet it broke out into the open, a black bear in full charge. No mistaking its intention. Ears flattened, eyes blazing, teeth bared, huffing and snorting, it lacked only the size, speed and volume of a big grizzly or Kodiak on the warpath.

My snuzzle stick was water-soaked and heavy from lying in the rainwater in the bottom of the boat. I grasped it in a two-handed swing like a ball player and brought it down across the bear's nose just as its teeth were snapping half a yard from my shins.

I must have hit hard. The bear shut its eyes tight, ducked its head, then turned and ran back to the top of the knoll. There it sat down to watch me. When I was sure it was not coming again, I backed off the log and headed for the beach.

I was mad. For more than fifty years I'd been prowling through the brush where black bear were as thick as rabbits, and I'd thought no more of meeting a black empty-handed than I'd thought of meeting people on the street. Now to have this fool bear destroy all my trust in the blacks, all my respect for them!

I found a big bear trail leading down through the timber, hurried to the beach, exchanged my snuzzle stick for the rifle and went back, getting madder all the time. The bear was still on the knoll, watching the log where it had last seen me. One well-placed shot, and it crumpled and rolled down the hill.

It was an old sow, the biggest female black bear I ever saw. Her coat was prime and she appeared to be in perfect condition. I was

wondering what could have made her charge, when I heard something in a hemlock tree at the top of the knoll—twin cubs.

Still I felt no regret. I had not gone between her and her cubs. I wasn't even heading in their direction. She was not a fit mother. She was training her children to be a pair of delinquents. It was only a couple of hours' walk, for a bear, across country to a recreation ground where people from town went to picnic, where women and children strolled the trails through the forest and small boys learned to fish for trout.

That night I was chock full of bear story and had no one to tell it to.

One day I was several miles down the inlet when I saw the Fish and Wildlife Service plane come in to my anchorage, circle the *Sylph* once, then land and taxi to her side. That could mean only that the plane had brought something or someone to the *Sylph*, as the pilot could see from the air that my speedboat was gone and know I wasn't there. The plane took off soon but I hurried home, hoping to find a very special someone.

As I drew near, two fishery biologists from the main office stepped out of the pilothouse. "Can you put up a couple of good-looking young ladies for the night?" they asked.

"You bet!" I declared, thinking they meant Ruth and Gram.

"Good," they said, grinning slyly. "Since there aren't any ladies around, you'll have room for us."

"Glad to have you," I answered, swallowing my disappointment, "especially if you can cook."

But the plane came back and took them away before meal time, so I cooked supper and ate alone.

Shortly afterward I went to the head of the longest arm and, as usual, stayed longer than I planned. Coming back famished about three hours after lunch time, I wondered what I could eat without taking time to cook it. The *Sylph* looked cold and deserted. I longed for the days when I'd come home to find a hot meal ready, and someone aboard waiting for me, and the thought came to me that nothing would look so good to me now as Ruth's face at the window.

Just then the door flew open and out stepped Ruth. She'd got one of the neighbors to look after Gram and had chartered a plane to bring her out with a box of good things to eat. In two days the plane returned for her and she hurried back to Gram.

Alone again, I had plenty of easy-to-cook food, and I was to need it during the fall seining season. With only six days open for fishing, the seiners worked around the clock. It seemed they were even more active at night than during the day, and I was the only watchman. In six days I had my clothes off only once.

The chum salmon had been congregating off the stream mouths, waiting for a freshet so they could go up to their spawning grounds. I found the greatest concentration off Dog Salmon Creek, so I moved the *Sylph* up and anchored just off the mouth of the creek. According to my estimate there were 50,000 salmon schooled up there, an irresistible temptation to the fast-buck fishermen. I was being paid to protect the salmon, and I resolved to stay right there until they got up the stream.

The day before the season opened, the Service plane came in and brought me a radiophone. It was the portable type, battery-powered, with a whip aerial too long to be extended inside the boat. I remembered it later, too well, as Emmet's Man Trap. Emmet was the pilot. He looked the boat over and found what he thought was the ideal place, just outside the pilothouse door on the roof of the lower cabin. He made the squawk box fast there, inserted the aerial, and pronounced it ready for use.

All that day and through the evening the fishing boats came into the bay, looking for promising fishing spots and also looking to see where the watchman was. The crews, five to seven men on each boat, were mostly Indians who had little to do with me except to ask occasionally where the boundaries were to the closed areas. They resented my being there. I was The Enemy, the one who kept them out of the places where the fish were most plentiful and easiest to catch.

The seiners would cruise slowly or stop and drift, watching the big schools of salmon, then go back out to prospect other grounds or anchor farther down the inlet. But four of them stayed in my harbor, anchored singly close by, to await the morrow's fishing.

Rumblings down the bay were the big diesel engines of the cannery packers, coming in to take the catch to town. They anchored farther down and kept their floodlights on all night to show they were ready for business with anyone who had fish to sell.

In the dead of night a boat came quietly up the inlet, all lights out. Some of the salmon had moved down with the outgoing tide and now were jumping and splashing, churning up a phosphorescent glow which advertised their exact location and approximate numbers—about 10,000. The boat came up slowly, then stopped, the crew watching the salmon.

An eddy in the tidal current caught my speedboat and swung it out from the shadow of the overhanging trees. Alert young eyes on the flying bridge soon detected it, the spotlight flicked on, swung, centered on me briefly, then blinked out. The boat turned and went back down the inlet. It wouldn't be back in the night, and members of the crew would warn their friends.

After the tide turned the fish quieted down. There were no more sounds of boat motors. The night was dark except for the light shining through the galley window of the *Sylph*. I'd left that light on deliberately. I knew there was no one aboard, but no one else did.

I went back aboard to get some coffee and thaw out. It was chilly sitting out there in the open boat hour after hour, doing nothing but watching. When the coffee was ready I turned off all lights and sat in the dark. That way it was easier to tell what was going on outside.

At five o'clock the lights came on in the galley of the nearest boat. It would be an hour before the opening, six o'clock in the morning. Part of my job was to see that no one crowded the starting time.

At five-thirty I heard motors starting up down the bay. The lights in the pilothouse of the nearest boat came on. Its big diesel engine roared into action, then settled to a deep-throated rumble.

I pulled my hip boots all the way up so they'd shed the spray and help keep my legs warm, buttoned my heavy wool coat, pulled on rubberized gloves, and stepped out to the shore side of the deck. It was still as dark as it had been at midnight. The current from the creek held the *Sylph* tugging gently on her anchor, parallel with the shore. That white material sailing past the boat, I made out to be foam from the rapids up in the canyon. The boats in the harbor were all lighted, all engines running. It was going to be a busy morning.

For ten years I'd been going the same way to my skiff. I came out on deck through the side door, took hold of the stay line to the mast to steady myself around the corner of the cabin past the stovepipe, and walked aft.

Some men were working on the deck of the farthest boat. Watching to see what they were doing, I grasped a line and started around the corner. My support swung out. When I tried to pull myself back, it broke off. Too late I realized that in the darkness I had grasped the aerial instead of the stay line. Overboard I went in ten fathoms.

I went deep. By the time I'd pawed my way to the surface of that icy water my breath was gone, my clothes were soaked to the skin and my boots were full. I got to the side of the boat, caught hold of the gunnel, and stopped to catch my breath.

Falling overboard was nothing new. In forty years as a handlogger I'd fallen in more times than I could count. It's one thing to crawl out onto a log when you're dressed in logging clothes. It is quite a different thing to get back onto the deck of a big boat when you're bundled to the teeth in a soaking wet cold-weather outfit. When I tried it I became alarmed. Although I pulled with all my might, the extra weight of the water in my clothes and boots was more than I could lift.

No use hollering for help. I wouldn't be heard above the noise of the engines. No one could see my predicament, I was behind the *Sylph*, and it was too dark anyway.

I looked toward shore. The current from the creek would sweep me out before I could make it. I tried getting out of my clothes. I couldn't do it with one hand and the current would carry me out if I let go of the gunnel. I tried lifting myself up slowly, letting the water drain off as I came up. My strength gave out and I had to drop back into the water. It certainly looked as if The Enemy was out of it for good.

Then I noticed the strong painter of my speedboat, tied securely to the stern of the *Sylph*. Holding onto the gunnel, I worked my way back and grasped the painter. It had enough slack that I could get my knee onto it. Slowly I pulled myself up until I lay on deck, gasping for breath. When I could get up I went down to the cabin, shaking with fatigue and so cold I could hardly take off my wet clothes.

The boats in the harbor began moving out. I stayed beside the stove and watched them go. That was the only time in my twelve years as a stream guard that I was not out for the six o'clock opening.

Later in the day the Service plane came in. They'd been calling me from the air, and getting no response, had dropped down to investigate. I told them what had happened and showed them my soggy clothes, my boots tipped up to drain, and the water still dripping from my coat.

"Where's the aerial now?" Emmet asked.

"Down in Davey Jones' locker," I said, pointing straight down.

"Good place for it. We'll rig an aerial from the mast," Emmet said. He did, and he put the radio inside, where it worked fine. Now I kept in touch with the office. On the last day they called me and said, "The season will close at six o'clock tonight. When the last boat leaves, you can come in."

I didn't argue. It was October and I'd been right there since the tenth of June. I knew every boat in the inlet, and when the last one pulled its seine skiff on deck and headed for town, I followed.

One day after the fishing season was over, I went to the office and we all went out for coffee. Someone referred to the episode with the aerial, and those who hadn't heard of it asked for details. I told the story and then said, "Now, fellows, I'm going to ask a favor of you. Please don't mention anything about it to anyone. If my wife ever hears about it, she'll worry herself sick every time I go out alone."

They didn't promise; they didn't have to. They were all loyal friends. I never heard any more about it, and Ruth's first inkling of the mishap was when she read this manuscript.





## Chapter 29

During one Fish and Wildlife Service research project I was a bachelor for a couple of months each spring. This was the Fry Studies, made to determine the productivity of the salmon spawning grounds.

When the salmon came upstream to spawn, in the summer and fall, a careful count was made of each species in selected streams. The following spring, after the eggs were hatched, a species count of the young salmon was made as they worked downstream toward the open sea.

To capture the fry for counting, a weir was constructed across a wide, shallow riffle in the stream above the high tide mark and traps were suspended from the upstream side. An attendant emptied the traps regularly, counted the fry, and returned them to

the stream below the weir. As the fry migrate only at night and would be smothered to death if crowded too long in the traps, the attendant made the count every two hours through the night. This meant he had to live nearby, in a tent a mile or more above the mouth of the stream.

I operated weirs on Herman, Dog Salmon and Bush Mountain creeks in successive seasons. I was sent out in April, the date depending upon weather conditions. The milder the previous winter and the earlier the spring, the sooner the infant salmon would wriggle their way out of the gravel in the stream beds. As I'd be living ashore anyway, we left the *Sylph* moored in Ketchikan and Ruth stayed to care for the boat and Gram. In early June she would get ready for the main work of the season, because I might come in from Fry Studies one day and go out on stream survey duty the next day.

Of the creeks on which I operated the weirs, I think Bush Mountain Creek, on Annette Island, was my favorite. My tent there, in a small glade just a few yards from the weir, was comfortable until a hot spell set in about the first of June. Then, under the midday sun, the canvas radiated heat like a stove with a good baking fire.

Seeking a more comfortable place to spend the daylight hours, I went down the trail along the creek and found an ideal spot at the edge of the big meadow. Here in a cluster of trees stood a large spruce, just off the bank of the creek. Its long lower branches drooped to shoulder height above the grass floor of the meadow, and beneath them a cool breeze blew from the creek. Between two of the big spruce roots was a moss-covered bank just chair height, with the roots for arm rests and the trunk of the tree for a back.

Here, when my morning's work was finished and the tent grew unbearably warm, I would come to rest, watch and write. No, I wasn't a writer, but I did have a great deal of material I wanted to get down on paper. I did try to write back in the hungry '30's, when there was no market for logs and we were casting about for ways to boil the pot. I worked hard at it, invested money we couldn't easily spare in paper and postage, and got paid off in rejection slips. After a while I realized that a lot of other people needed money as badly as I did and quite a number of them were better qualified to write, so I withdrew from the competition.

Later, when I had plenty of profitable work to do, the editor of the *Alaska Sportsman*® invited me to submit some articles, and when I found time to write them he actually bought them. It pleased me to see my words in print, and to see my byline on the pages of a slick-paper magazine. Who wouldn't be pleased? Especially if his school years ended with the ninth grade? But now I was mainly interested in putting down some of the things it had been my privilege to see and learn in a lifetime spent mostly in the wilderness. When or whether any of them would be published, I'd worry about later.

Seated on my spruce-tree throne, in what I called my study, with a wide board across my knees for a writing desk, I could write in comfort. A thin row of crabapple trees screened me but allowed me to see out onto the meadow. Between paragraphs I would watch for the deer I often saw crossing there.

To my right, on the edge of the low bank, a scraggly crabapple tree leaned out over the water, its branches festooned with long whitish streamers of Spanish moss. Sandpipers teetered along the sandy shore and a mother merganser came by with her brood, three of the crafty ones hitching a ride on her back. A kingfisher rattled noisily from a dead snag, plummeted occasionally into the water, then flew back with a silvery fish in his beak. He always beat his fish against the snag before he swallowed it.

At the tip of a tall hemlock was a dead limb on which an old bald eagle perched when he came by on his daily patrol. A vesper sparrow sat every day within twenty feet and serenaded me.

Overhead the thick spruce branches, each wearing a wide pad of green moss, formed a well insulated canopy which sheltered me from the heat of the sun. I could sit there and look down the three-quarters of a mile of trail to the beach, and through an opening in the trees I could see the sparkling surface of the bay. Fishing boats sometimes came there to anchor, but the fishermen were busy folk who rarely came ashore.

June 5 broke with a cloudless sky. Another warm day, and my routine would be the same: coffee at seven-thirty, then out at eight to make my last lift of the traps. As I lifted each trap I emptied the salmon fry into buckets of water. Then came the tedious, exacting task of counting the wiggly inch-and-a-half long babies. Dipping a few at a time from the bucket, I noted the number of pinks, of chums and of silvers, recorded them with the

I longed to see Ruth picking wildflowers.



three mechanical counters on my fingers and returned them, still wiggling frantically, to the stream below the weir. The rainbows, cutthroats and bullheads, their numbers less, I kept count of in my mind, and the worthless, predatory bullheads I tossed onto the bank for the mink.

The counting finished and the numbers entered in my field diary, I took readings of the air and water temperatures and entered those in the book. My night's work was done. I went back to the tent and got my breakfast. Doing my own cooking wasn't so bad, but how nice it would be, I thought as I ate, if I had Ruth to talk to.

I put the camp in order, then made out my reports. It had been a busy night. Working mostly by the light of a gasoline lantern, I had sorted, counted and released more than 7,000 baby salmon. I was free of duties until eight o'clock in the evening, when I would set the traps again.

Meanwhile I'd been edging farther and farther from the side of the tent, which was beginning to feel like an open furnace door. Lingered no longer than necessary, I hurried down to my study, my mind on the paragraph I would write next.

But first I made my daily survey of the meadow. The mirror surfaces of the grass-fringed ponds rippled at my approach as sticklebacks scuttled to hiding places beneath the frog moss. The shooting stars were beginning to fade from the hot weather. The black wild rice lilies were coming into bloom by the hundreds. The paintbrushes were brighter today and so were the fields of buttercups, and the blue lupines, now waist-high. The crabapple bush interested me most — that large clump at the end of a finger of timber which pointed out into the meadow. From a distance it looked like a large white mound against the dark spruce forest. Yesterday the large clusters of pink buds had just begun to open. This morning they were out in full bloom. I circled the clump, looking for the best spot from which to take a color picture.

Ah, this was it. Now, if Ruth were standing there with her red jacket on . . . The black lilies and blue lupines showed up well in the foreground. I examined the crabapple blossoms. A few were still in bud. Maybe it would be better tomorrow. I would wait.

Back at my study, settled with my board on my lap, I paused to watch a bee busily going from flower to flower on a tall spike of

lupine. As it left a hummingbird came, went over the same blossoms, then buzzed away. Beyond the undulating field of bear grass was the trail to the beach. Why did my eyes keep straying to that trail? No one ever came up it. I hadn't seen a soul to talk to for two weeks.

I read over the last paragraph I'd written, checked my notes, then found my attention distracted again by a faint vibration in the air. It increased rapidly to a distant roar. A plane. This was on the passenger plane route to Prince Rupert, but I was not hearing the Rupert plane. This was a deeper drone. It approached rapidly and was soon visible directly overhead, the black and orange of the Fish and Wildlife Service plane. It passed out of sight but I heard it circling, and when it came back I saw it tip so the pilot could look down at my tent. It circled again for another run. That was my call. I walked out into the meadow and waved as the plane came over, just above the treetops. Its motor cut, it glided down to the bay for a landing. I started down the trail.

Minutes later a long-legged biologist came striding up the trail. He was in charge of the work I was doing, and he was coming for my reports. When I started back to the tent with him, he said, "Your wife is down there."

I hurried to the beach.

The next time we went out to guard the streams of Moira Sound, Gram was not with us. She had died aboard the *Sylph* at the age of eighty-nine. The Service boat was sent out to Bush Mountain Creek to let me know, and take me in for her funeral.





## Chapter 30

When Ruth and I began climbing the hills and following the streams together, only a few of the mountains and lakes and streams of Southeastern Alaska were officially named. Our only maps were the admiralty charts for boat navigation. The marine waterways were shown and named, but only the larger rivers and lakes were shown, most likely by dotted lines to indicate that their locations or courses were only approximated.

The peaks along the international boundary had been named at the time of the boundary survey, and the peak overshadowing Ketchikan had become known as Deer Mountain because winter's white mantle, as it melts away, assumes a shape that reminded the Indians of a deer. But the scores of craggy crests between were as nameless as molehills.

Living in the same locality for months at a time, we naturally adopted geographic names for our own convenience. When planning a prospecting trip, for instance, or telling where we got that big mink, it was awkward to speak of "the third creek above Carp Island on the south side of Smeaton Bay." To call it Roaring Creek was much simpler.

Roaring Creek was across the bay from our home anchorage at Cabin Creek, so named because of an old trapper's cabin at its mouth, the only sign of human habitation in that part of the country—and the only name that has endured.

Our name for Roaring Creek was equally apt but known only to us. The creek comes charging down a narrow box canyon to the tide line, where at low water it plunges over a cliff into the deep water of the bay. As the tide rises the fall is submerged and silent, but as the tide recedes the fall becomes higher, and its roar increases until it resounds across all that part of the inlet.

Some places were known already by the names of men who had some interest there—Herman, Grant, Jim, Old Tom's creeks—and many of those names are on the maps today, but most of our local names were for our own use and when we moved on we took them with us, leaving the places for future map-makers to identify as they saw fit. One of those was One-Eye Creek, where Ruth's father was hit in the eye and nearly blinded by a devil's club.

Usually we applied names of simpler origin. We always could find a Bear Creek and a Wolf Creek, and of course a Trout Creek. The most beautiful stream we ever explored we referred to fondly as Pretty Creek.

It was the same with the mountains. We had our own Black Peak, Red Mountain, Ptarmigan Ridge and Goat Mountain, their names chosen for reasons obvious to anyone who knows them. Our Betty Mountain got its name for a more personal reason. One sunny day we were cruising up the inlet and Ruth, on deck, was gazing dreamily at the mountains. When we were in a position to look back up a wide valley, she called to me, "Look at that mountain. Does it remind you of someone?"

Its contour was a woman's face in profile. "Why, it's Betty!" I said.

She never saw the mountain so far as I know, but I think she would not be offended to have it known by her name. It is a pretty

mountain. And of course the creek leading to Betty Mountain, where we often went trout fishing, was Betty Creek to us.

I recall another mountain which was bestowed with a name that didn't take. It was while I was guiding. I had led my hunter through a primeval forest far up an unnamed valley. As we came to a grassy meadow our view expanded so we could see that the valley forked, and between the forks a steep-sided mountain rose sharply from the valley floor. Its lower slopes were skirted with dense forests banded vertically by slide paths that ended in gray talus slopes. Above the timber were green alpine meadows, and farther above, with gleaming snowfields clinging to its sides, the craggy peak reached toward the clouds.

My hunter looked in rapt silence for several minutes and then said, "I'm going to name that Jackson Mountain."

But it takes more than the saying to name a mountain. One must apply to the Board of Geographic Names in Washington, D.C. So the peak is still unnamed, and I doubt whether my hunter could put his finger on the right spot on the map.

Although the mountains had a fascination we found hard to resist, few days in Southeastern Alaska are ideal for climbing. Much of the year the mountains are blanketed with deep snow or curtained by dense clouds. Often when ideal climbing weather did come, we had duties we could not postpone. And then, after swinging a long-handled falling ax or wrassling with the logging jacks (who ever heard of a handlogger "wrestling" with a jack?) for a couple of weeks, I found it much more relaxing to seek the cool shade beside some pool on a nameless creek, where the ferns waved in the breeze, the trout leaped, and the murmur of rapids accompanied the song of the water ouzel.

It was on one of those outings, early in our life together, that I learned what a thorough sportsman I had as my companion. We had taken the day off to go trout fishing on Boulder Creek, where we could always get a good mess of pan-size rainbows.

You needn't look for Boulder Creek on the map. You won't find it. But it was Boulder Creek to us, and rightly so. It is a swift stream charging down a deep, rocky canyon in a series of low falls, with whitewater clear to the saltchuck. When you follow the creek you're either walking on solid granite like a tilted sidewalk, or stepping from boulder to boulder. At times you must make long strides, or short leaps, and the large boulders, as big as a room of

your house, you have to go around. There isn't enough sand in the whole canyon to show a bear track.

Between the falls are short, deep pools and in each pool there are three or four trout, but you have to be fast to get them. They hit suddenly and hard. They have to, or the swift current will carry the feed down to the next pool and some faster fish will get it. I took a dude fisherman in there once. After missing the first dozen strikes he declared, "You have to be a damned mind-reader to catch these fish!"

On this day the fishing was especially lively. We already had enough for ourselves, but we were planning to call on our neighbors and we wanted to take them a good mess. Coming to a deep, dark pool at the foot of a low waterfall, Ruth cast into the eddy at the edge of the foam. Instantly a broad, dark back arched up and a wide, speckled dorsal fin emerged, then went back under the foam with a heavy, solid tug to the line. Ruth gasped. A fish that big had no business being there. She set her feet firmly. She had work to do.

He didn't take out much line. He had no place to go. From the angle of the line we saw he was exploring the lowest depths. Then he came flashing into the air and we had a fleeting glimpse of the red gill plates and the broad red band on the side. His size startled us. As he raced around the pool, Ruth gave a furtive glance at the rapids below. If he went down there, she'd never be able to keep up with him on the boulder-strewn shore. Instead he headed toward the falls and made a gallant leap, but Ruth swung him back into the pool. He made three more leaps at the falls, then contained his battle to the depths.

Eventually he tired and Ruth led him in. He was a full twenty inches long, thick and heavy, and the most beautifully colored rainbow I ever saw. The hook came out easily as he lay gasping on the rocks. Ruth, beaming with just pride, stood admiring him. Then she knelt, slipped her hands gently under him, and slid him back into the pool.

"He's just too beautiful to kill," she explained.

I was proud of my wife. He was really a "braggin' fish," and we were going to see some ardent fishermen she could brag to, but that goodbye wave of his tail as he slithered down into the depths of his pool gave us both more satisfaction than we could get from all the dead fish we could carry.



Trout have a remarkable ability to adapt their growth to the size of the body of water they inhabit. Those trapped above a waterfall in a small stream just don't get any bigger. Little streams with their stunted cutthroats are wonderfully suitable for teaching small boys the art of trout fishing.

One summer when I was stationed as stream guard on the Naha River, we had our nephews out with us. Nine-year-old Brucie was an enthusiastic fisherman who, given plenty of hooks to replace those lost on sunken logs, never wanted to quit so long as a fish would bite.

The pools in the Naha are wide and deep and the rainbows, big and well-educated, were far more than the boys could handle, so one day I took them to a little red-water stream where both trout and water were proportioned to their size. There were logs and boulders and small pools between long stretches of riffles. In each pool were a few pan-size cutthroats and dozens of small fry, and the first to get his hook into the water would get the larger ones.

Brucie, all intent upon "beating Unkie," would race from pool to pool, bounding on nimble legs over logs and rocks and splashing through the water, never looking nor caring whether it was ankle-deep or waist-deep. I was hard-pressed even to keep him in sight.

As the good old days of no limit were past, I was trying to encourage him to be a good sportsman and comply with the regulations, besides teaching him to fish, and I thought I was making good progress at both.

So, when Brucie caught his limit he reluctantly reeled in his line and quit. Back at the boat, he dressed his catch and proudly laid it

The Rudyerd Bay area offered endless possibilities for exploring coves and creeks.





out—exactly the legal daily bag limit. I commended him on his sportsmanship.

Several days later Ruth noticed an offensive odor in the boys' room and found one small but very, very overripe cutthroat hidden and forgotten in Brucie's coat pocket.

When the Johnstone family first moved to Rudyerd Bay to log, it was new country to them and known only by hearsay to any but a few outdoorsmen. While the menfolk were at work, Ruth and Kate had time to row around the spectacularly scenic fjord exploring the coves and creeks.

One day they found and followed an old blazed trail. It led them to the bank of a large creek that came tumbling down a mountainside. The creek took them on a stiff climb, then leveled off, and through the trees ahead they could see the gleam of water. They broke out of the forest at the outlet of a blue jewel nestled in the heart of the mountain.

Surrounded as it was by granite walls that reached to the snow-packed peaks, not a breath of wind touched the lake and its tranquil surface reflected the clouds, the timberline meadows and the stunted trees that clung to the granite. In that flawless mirror it was impossible to distinguish the meeting point of cliffs and water. Standing on the logjam at the outlet, the girls peered down into the clear water and watched schools of brightly colored trout, with the white-winged gulls, circling overhead, appearing to move among them in the depths.

An old dugout canoe was cached nearby. Though they were reluctant to disturb the images on the lake's surface, an alpine meadow at its head was calling. They launched the canoe and paddled to the upper end of the lake, where they landed on a beach of clean white sand and walked across flower-decked meadows bordered by dark spruce trees with long, drooping branches. A crystal clear brook tumbled down the granite wall in a silvery cascade and wound across the meadows, and where it was lined with willows the beavers had built a dam.

The girls sat among the bright flowers of the meadow, watching mountain goats feed on narrow shelves of the jagged peaks and absorbing the beauty all about them. They stayed a long time. It was the most beautiful place they had ever seen, and not another human being had been there for years.

Who blazed the trail and made the canoe? And what did he call the lovely lake? We never knew.

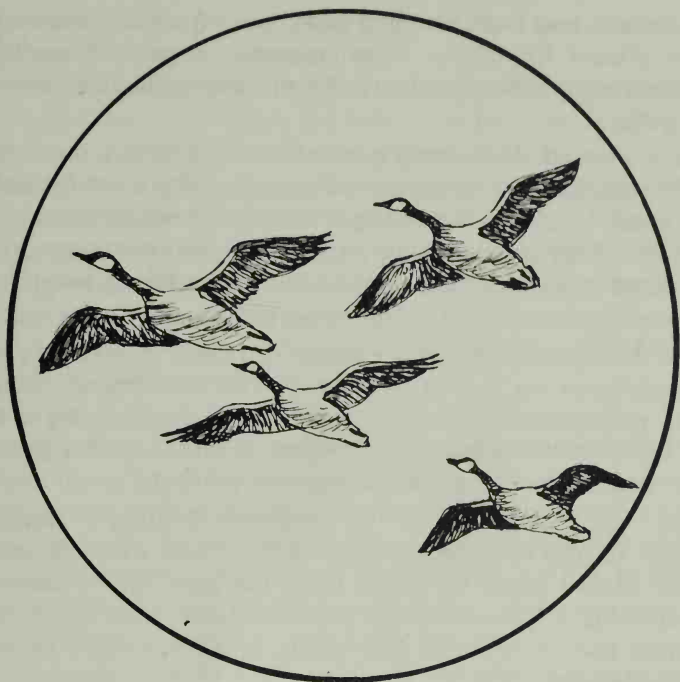
Later that summer, Stewart Edward White and Robert Pinkerton cruised into the Johnstone camp on their first trip to Alaska, and the girls guided the visitors to their new-found lake. White, who had traveled extensively, declared it the most beautiful spot he had ever seen, and named it Lake Katherine in honor of his young guide.

But, like my hunter and the mountain, White did nothing to perpetuate the name he chose for the lake.

Several years later a party of tourists came in aboard a Seattle yacht and, hearing of the big, brightly colored trout, went back to the lake. Enthralled by its beauty, they, too, chose a name for the lake. They called it Nooya, the name of their yacht.

By the time I learned about it, Stewart Edward White was dead. Hoping to get official recognition of the name White had given the lake, I wrote to my old friend Frank Dufresne, then stationed in Washington, D.C. It was too late. The tourists had done more than merely select a name, and already it was on the maps as Nooya Lake.

But to us it always has been and always will be Katy's Lake, in memory of the one who first put it on the map for us and whose ashes are now resting in a place overlooking the most beautiful spot on earth.



## Chapter 31

The time was just past noon on a dark, wintry day in February, time for the news and, after that, the weather forecast. We were moored at the City Float in Ketchikan and I was standing beside the radio. I was interested in the latest news, yes, but the weather forecast was something no boatman wanted to miss. It warned us of the sudden winter gales that came screaming in off the North Pacific, so we could put out more fenders and double our head lines.

As I waited I saw a young couple standing on the float, looking at our boat. That was common enough on pleasant summer evenings, when city folk liked to come down and stroll along the floats, but on a stormy winter day, any non-boaters attracted notice.

Ruth, too, saw them standing there, looking so cold she invited them aboard for coffee. They accepted eagerly. Knowing I wouldn't want to be disturbed just then, she led them down into the galley.

Later she told me the young couple wanted to buy the *Sylph*.

"Buy the *Sylph*?" I repeated indignantly. "She's not for sale!"

"I know," Ruth replied calmly, "but I told them I'd talk it over with you. They said they'd be back, and if we did happen to be interested in selling, they want to know our asking price."

"Don't worry," I said. "They'll never be back."

Sell the *Sylph*? She was our home, had been for sixteen years, and we loved her just as landlubbers love their homes. Maybe more, as she had also been our magic carpet, transporting us and our friends and clients on many an adventurous cruise. And, of course, she was our means of earning a living.

Oh, we'd have to give her up sometime. Boating in Alaska is rugged for old folks, especially in winter, and the time would come when I could no longer work the boat. But I was only seventy-eight. I knew several old-timers who were up in their eighties and still working their boats, and I had work for ours come summer.

Ruth and I talked it over and agreed we wouldn't sell. We even agreed on a price we wouldn't sell for. "But don't worry," I said again, "those kids'll never come back."

They did come back, though, and they asked whether I'd mind showing them the rest of the boat. Well, I was proud of our boat and quite willing to show them around—after assuring them we had no intention of selling. I showed them the stateroom aft with the bunks for four, and the two-bunk forward stateroom we used as our living quarters. I showed them the head with its shower and dry room, the spacious pilothouse with its built-in bunk, and the engine room with its generating plant and big storage tanks.

True, I did get a little enthusiastic about the capacity of those tanks, and the length of time we could cruise without thought of whether the gas, stove oil and fresh water were running low. I got a little enthusiastic, too, about the unusual amount of closet and locker space the *Sylph* had in comparison to most boats. I guess I did mention some of the charter parties we'd had aboard, and it may be I threw in a bear story or two. But I doubt whether they

heard and saw it all. They'd been married all of two weeks, and they had eyes mainly for each other.

"Yes, we're mighty comfortable aboard," I said expansively as we ended the tour. "She's the best investment we ever made. Why, she's paid for herself in apartment rent alone."

Then the young man made his offer. It was so close to the figure we had mentioned between us that I looked sharply at Ruth. Was she up to her old tricks? Working things around so I'd do what she wanted to do, thinking it was my idea all along? Her back was toward me as she returned the coffee pot to the stove. She came back and sat down, her face showing only her usual friendly, hospitable good humor.

The talk went on but I wasn't paying much attention. I was looking at Ruth. To me she was still lithe and lovely, still the same golden-haired girl I had won right from under Daddy Johnstone's jealous nose, and I'd do it again if I had to. But that was more than forty years ago. Her step wasn't quite so light and sure nowadays, I had to admit. The streams were getting longer for her, as well as for me, the hoot of the blue grouse was farther back in the hills—and when had the curls turned to silver?

Our decision not to sell, now that I thought of it, was based entirely upon what I wanted or what I felt I could do. But I wasn't selfish and self-centered, or I didn't intend to be; it was only because I, a dozen years older than Ruth, just naturally expected my time to run out first.

The couple rose to go.

"We could give you a cash down payment right now," the young man said. "But you definitely aren't ready to sell?"

"We---ll," I answered hesitantly, "What about it, Ruth?"

"Well, I don't suppose we'll want to live on the boat forever," she replied slowly, as if she were thinking about it for the first time. "So we'll be selling sometime, but we'd only sell to someone we liked—some nice young couple who'd really love the boat."

She paused so long I thought she had finished, then looked straight at me and added, "You really don't have to work any more, you know."

She was right, as usual. Let Jack and George and Charlie work until they were fit for nothing but the Pioneer Home. I didn't have

to. Besides, Alaska wasn't the same any more. Our beloved land of unmapped wilderness was now the forty-ninth state, with air maps to pinpoint every peak and pond. Maybe we should explore some of the older states before we got too old. These youngsters wouldn't miss the good years we had known. They were born to the present, their good years were now, their lifetime was mostly in the future, and the *Sylph* would make them a good home and a living, just as she had for us.

We accepted five hundred dollars in earnest money and agreed to meet them at the bank to close the deal.

We were a subdued pair the rest of that afternoon and through the evening as we thought about the drastic changes we had suddenly committed ourselves to making—changes that would affect every moment of our lives from that day to the very end.

Uppermost in my own mind was the thought of retirement. I was a working man, always had been, and my concepts were formed back in the years before working men retired while they were still able to work. To retire, therefore, implied surrender to age and physical incapacity, submission to the status of a has-been. Well, I wasn't that old and I wasn't incapable. I didn't feel like surrendering; I didn't want to submit.

"A man doesn't necessarily become a has-been when he stops working for money," Ruth reasoned. "You never did work just to make money, anyway. You've always liked doing certain things, and some of them were profitable. Now you've earned all we're going to need, and we can't take it with us, and all the ones we might pass it on to are doing all right for themselves. Now you can spend your time on some of the other things you like doing."

Looking at it that way, retirement lost its sting and its stigma. The years ahead were no longer shadowed with the gloom of stagnation, they were bright with promises of new adventure. So why not look at it that way? It might take a little time to readjust my thinking, but I was still young enough to do that.

Meanwhile we had other readjustments to make. I'd been a gas-boater for forty-six years, I'd brought my bride aboard the *Alton* on our wedding day and we had gone from her to the *Sylph*. All of Southeastern Alaska had in effect been our estate. We had spent days or weeks or months in countless coves and bays and inlets without leaving the familiar comforts of our own home. Could we be content to live ashore?



"Lots of people do live in houses or apartments," Ruth said philosophically. "We won't have to tie ourselves down. If we get tired of one place we'll just pack our suitcases and go somewhere else."

Our only real problem, then, was reducing the gatherings of forty-odd years to suitcase dimensions. This would be a monumental chore as our packrat habits, abetted by all that cherished storage space aboard the *Sylph*, stemmed from the old days when, isolated for long periods in the wilderness, we'd had to improvise repairs and substitutes from whatever was at hand. Like the time I patched a broken propeller shaft with boot-top leather and fish line. Or the time, out on the trap line, when all lights failed and we worked by the light of homemade miner's lamps burning mink grease.

"We'll just throw all the junk overboard," we told each other. "We'll start in the morning, first thing after breakfast."

As we finished our breakfast coffee Ruth looked sadly around the room, then said, "Let's call the deal off and give the kids back their money."

But we didn't. We got busy emptying drawers and cupboards, closets and lockers. It went fast at first as we pulled out a small mountain of trash we didn't need, didn't want, wondered why we'd kept. It went overboard without a thought. But then there were the keepsakes—lace from Gram's wedding gown, the spectacles Ruth's great-grandmother brought from Ireland, Daddy Johnstone's Indian peace pipe from Montana. We couldn't dispose of those, and with them Ruth packed the Christmas tree trinket that was my very own the year I graduated from dresses.

My lapidary outfit, my polished agates and my gem collection we packed, of course. From the uncut material I sorted out the choice pieces and gave away a wheelbarrow load. The rest, enough second grade paving material to ballast a sailboat, went overboard and I enjoyed hearing it splash.

At last we had nothing left to get rid of except two small collections, his and hers, on the lower bunks of the stateroom aft—items of sentimental value only, and that only to us. We'd be silly to drag them around, yet we hadn't the courage to part with them. Progress came to a standstill. We knew if we saw these things going overboard, we'd grab a pike pole and fish them out.

We solved part of that problem by waiting until after dark, so we couldn't see them sink. When we came to the old, dog-eared cookbook with which Gram had started housekeeping, and the now useless rifle with which I'd killed my first grizzly, we exchanged responsibility. I disposed of the cookbook. Ruth got rid of the gun. Kate's old wooden doll, weighted down with some of my better rocks, got decent burial at sea.

As we moved off the *Sylph* the young couple moved aboard, and when last we heard they still loved their floating home.

In our furnished apartment uptown, in place of the drumming of rain on the roof and the shrieking of wind in the rigging, we heard the thudding of footsteps in the halls and the screeching, roaring automobile traffic just outside, and the floor was monotonously steady.

We stuck it out through the summer but when the leaves started to turn, when the geese went over on their way south and we felt a nip of frost in the air, I caught a dreamy look in Ruth's eyes. Though she would never say it, I knew what she was thinking. Soon the first snow would be falling, and tiny tracks would show on the mink trails. Other boats would be heading for the trap lines, and we had no boat to follow.

"I always did wonder what winter's like in Hawaii," I said.

"So did I," Ruth replied.

So, we packed our suitcases and flew south like the geese, to explore the youngest of all the states.

## EPILOGUE

William H. "Handlogger" Jackson did not live to see in print the book he dedicated to "my life's great, beloved companion, the Golden-Haired Girl." He died in 1970, at the age of 86. Ruth survived him, so if ever a dedication lived on, this one does.

In spite of the book's ending, the Jacksons never could escape Alaska entirely. They returned for the summers, and Mrs. Jackson still divides her time between Alaska and Yuma, Arizona.

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# HANDLOGGERS

**"Good, old-fashioned outdoors story-telling. . . . A rare piece of Americana." — *San Francisco Chronicle***

**"Moving and exciting. . . . a powerful story." — *Logger's World***

**"The warmest book I've read in a long time." — *Seattle Post-Intelligencer***

## ***An Alaska adventure tale, full of action***

"The wind was now a shrieking gale. With all my chain out, the anchor was dragging on the rocky bottom and the stern of the *Sylph* was dangerously close to the rocks. I called to Wes that we would have to get out and he made one more try to reach us. A combie caught his skiff, filling it half full, and he drifted back into the darkness."

"We found where the bear had waited . . . He would see us first, from a place of his own choosing. He knew this area as thoroughly as I knew the deck of my boat. If he would leave such a good ambush, what else did he have in mind?"

"The gully was steep, narrowed to a trail at the bottom. I entered, looking for any sign that the grizzly had gone that way. Suddenly Ruth called, 'Hold everything.' Her rifle at the ready, she was looking up, above my head. A clump of moss started to rise. A big furry head emerged . . ."

## ***The story of an unusual one-man job, handlogging***

"You are lying there beneath the log, working to free it. When the last blow of the ax or the last stroke of the jack loosens the log, things start to happen incredibly fast. Before you have time to leap to your feet the tree is roaring past with the speed of an express train, smashing everything in its path."

"I was falling an extra-tall spruce on the brink of a 300-foot cliff that rose straight from the water of the bay. I was making the last strokes with the saw when I heard the drone of a motor. With a last loud pop the 175-foot tree let go. It was nearly horizontal and sweeping downward with terrific speed when I saw the Fish and Wildlife Service plane flying directly beneath it."

## ***A romance of 43 companionable years—told by the husband***

"That evening our campfire blazed merrily and the smoke spiraled straight up toward a million stars. A bright glow rimmed the horizon to the north and a battery of searchlights sent beams up from behind the hills, playing back and forth, reaching high into the sky and then receding. Watching the Northern Lights, talking, drinking coffee, we stayed up long after we should have been asleep."